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Philosophical, Historical, and Moral

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Philosophical, Historical, and Moral

E S S A Y

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O L D M A I D S.

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A FRIEND TO THE SISTERHOOD.

I N T H R E E V O L U M E S.

V O L. II.

To unfold the sage

And serious Doctrine of Virginity. MILTON'S COMUS.

Περὶ τῶνδε κορῶν ἐν τοῖς θαλαμοῖς γηρυσμένητων ἀνίσταται.

ARISTOPHANES.

Nemo apud nos, qui idem tentaverit; nemo apud Græcos, qui unus omnia ea tractaverit.—Res ardua, vetustis novitatem dare, novis auctoritatem, obsoletis nitorem, obscuris lucem, fastiditis gratiam, dubiis fidem, omnibus vero naturam, et naturæ suæ omnia. Itaque, etiam non affecutis, voluisse, abundè pulchrum atque magnificum est.

PLINII Hist. Nat. Præfatio.

L O N D O N :

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AN
E S S A Y
ON
OLD MAIDS.

PART III.
ON OLD MAIDS IN ANCIENT HISTORY.

CHAP. I.

*Conjectures concerning the Existence of Old
Maids before the Deluge.*

A DUTCH author, distinguished by his erudition and his misfortunes, has endeavoured to prove, in a dissertation of more learning than modesty, that, when our progenitors were first created, it was the intention of Heaven, that Eve herself should become an Old Maid; and that

VOL. II.

B

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original sin was introduced into the world by the disobedience of our frail mother, not literally in eating a mysterious fruit, but in wandering from the path of virgin purity. This fanciful hypothesis did not arise in the heavy air of Holland—the idea was entertained by some illustrious fathers of the church; and the great living historian of the Roman empire, in those sarcastic remarks on Christianity, which are the only blemish in his exquisite composition, has observed, “it was their favourite
“ opinion, that if Adam had preserved his
“ obedience to the Creator, he would have
“ lived and died in a state of virgin purity,
“ and that some harmless mode of vegeta-
“ tion might have peopled Paradise with a
“ race of innocent and immortal beings.” In a note to this passage, the great historian informs us, that “Justin, Gregory of Nyssa,
“ Augustin, &c. strongly inclined to this
“ opinion;” but he has not attended, with his usual accuracy, to the idea entertained by the last of these fathers on this curious point.

point. Augustin, in the 14th book of his City of God, enters into a long and rather indelicate discussion of it. He affirms, that Paradise would have been peopled, not by *a harmless mode of vegetation*, but by an actual intercourse between the sexes, yet unstimulated by any wanton or passionate desire; and, as a proof that man might have possessed this perfect command over his innocent frame, the good father, and his learned commentator Lodovicus Vives, alledge the most whimsical and ludicrous occurrences that were ever recorded by a serious pen. The curious reader may find these extraordinary anecdotes related in very coarse but explicit language, at the 498th page of the English translation of St. Augustin, printed in 1620. I ought, perhaps, like the holy father himself, when speaking of matters much more indecent, to ask the pardon of chaste eyes, for pointing out to them such indelicate wonders; but, I flatter myself, the kind sisterhood will forgive the coarseness of the story, for

the sake of my zealous solicitude to indulge their curiosity. I trust I may afford them both amusement and instruction, by shewing them how strangely men of the most reverend character have been betrayed, by frivolous speculation, into the grossest absurdity.

Perhaps, without the sanctity of Augustin, I am now exposing myself to a similar censure; but if an enquiry into antediluvian virginity should be considered by any morose or sceptical readers as a frivolous speculation, let them remember, that I am professedly following the example of those great antiquarians, who have astonished the present enlightened age by the profundity of their researches. The elaborate works of these gentlemen evidently prove, that they have two considerable and separate points to pursue; the first and most important, to display their own extensive erudition; the second and inferior, to inform or to amuse their reader, which, like all other secondary aims, must be frequently sacrificed

sacrificed to the more important. After the marvellous intimate acquaintance which the learned Mr. Bryant has shewn with the family of Chus, the grandson of Noah, every author who professes to treat of an ancient institution, may be reasonably expected to give some account of whatever relates to it, either immediately after, or long before the deluge; and the respect which I bear to the sisterhood makes me ambitious of shewing them, that I have diligently ransacked such memorials of past ages, both genuine and fictitious, as I thought likely to elucidate the history of their long-neglected though venerable order: yet, as it is an established privilege of authors to point out their own particular merits, and the particular failings of their brethren, let me here modestly boast of my own candour, in not endeavouring to raise the antiquity of the interesting order to which my pen is devoted, at the expence of truth; a failing that almost all my brother antiquarians may be said, I fear, to have

learned from each other. For my own part, I wish the chaste sisterhood, in all points that concern both themselves and others, to distinguish rumour from fact.

On these principles I shall proceed to tell them, that Eve herself has been said to have instituted a religious order of certain young women, who were to continue virgins, and to preserve unextinguished the fire, which had fallen from heaven on the sacrifice of Abel *. This chaste institution is reported to have arisen in the ninety-ninth year of the world. An advocate for the existence of antediluvian chastity may appeal to an evidence of respectable authority, to no less a personage than the prophet Enoch, the seventh in a direct line from Adam. In certain fragments, still preserved, of this most early writer, we are told, that some women, in the age of this ingenious patriarch, had devoted themselves to a life of virginity: but it is pro-

* St. Romuald *Abrégé du Tresor Chronologique*.

per to add, that although the composition of Enoch is mentioned in the Epistle of St. Jude, the authenticity of these fragments has been forcibly called in question, and, though quoted and defended by some of the fathers, yet most modern authors of eminence, and particularly the learned Sir Walter Rawleigh, in the first book of his History of the World, seem inclined to consider them as a fiction.

The very concise narration which Moses has given us of events before the flood, has tempted the fanciful rabbies of the Jews, and other writers on sacred history, to amuse themselves with the composition of various antediluvian romances: among the most remarkable and amusing of these, we may reckon the fable of an amorous connection between the apostate angels and the daughters of men; a fable so fascinating to a lively imagination, that our divine poet has introduced it, in the most serious manner, as a part of Satan's answer to Belial, in the 2d book of Paradise Regained.

*Before the flood, thou, with thy lusty crew,
False titled Sons of God, roaming the earth,
Cast wanton eyes on the daughters of men,
And coupled with them, and begot a race.*

Ver. 179, &c.

We may observe also, that in his greater poem, this sublimest of bards alludes more than once to this illicit commerce

Betwixt th' angelical and human kind.

As the idea was founded on a misconstruction of the following passage in the sixth chapter of Genesis, "The sons of God saw
" the daughters of men, that they were fair,
" and they took them wives of all which
" they chose," this strange story has been sometimes an object of the most serious credit; and a very learned modern divine * has annexed, to his elaborate History of the Patriarchs, a dissertation to prove, from scripture, from reason, and from the

* Heidegger,

nature of angels, that these ætherial spirits, whatever shape they might assume, were utterly incapable of begetting children.

If we might venture to consider this fable as genuine history, we might certainly draw from it a very strong argument against the existence of antediluvian Old Maids; for, if the evil spirits were permitted to exercise such power over the females of the infant world, what fair individual could be supposed to have preserved her chastity, when both men and demons were personally engaged in its destruction?

But, rejecting this fabulous interference of these licentious angels, and adhering to the more just interpretation of the Mosaic history, let us now examine what we may fairly conclude on the point in question. The family of Seth are represented as orderly and devout; but, as the state of the world seemed to require a hasty increase of its inhabitants, it is not probable that any female, even in that sober race, should have proved so unreasonable as to decline con-
curing

curring in the important work of peopling the wide wilderness of the earth. If any peculiar sanctity or self-denial may be supposed to have existed, for a short time, among this more innocent division of the human race, it was soon overpowered by the influence of the most licentious examples. The purity of the Sethites was corrupted by the temptations they found among the children of Cain; and the state of female manners at this period is very forcibly described in the following lines of Milton:

*For that fair female troop thou saw'st, that
seem'd
Of Goddesses so blithe, so smooth, so gay,
Yet empty of all good, wherein consists
Woman's domestic honour and chief praise;
Bred only and completed to the taste
Of lustful appetite, to sing, to dance,
To dress, and troll the tongue, and roll the eye;
To these that sober race of men, whose lives
Religious titled them the sons of God,*

*Shall yield up all their virtue, all their fame,
 Ignobly, to the trains and to the smiles
 Of these fair atheists, and now swim in joy,
 Ere long to swim at large; and laugh, for
 which*

*The world, ere long, a world of tears must
 weep.*

Paradise Lost, Book xi. ver 614.

These verses, compared with the former quotation from *Paradise Regained*, afford a striking proof how ingeniously the great poet adopted the most opposite interpretations of scripture, as they happened to suit his poetical purposes.

I cannot help remarking, that although some lines in the passage just quoted are supremely beautiful, yet, in the close of it, both the genius and the justice of this incomparable poet appear to have deserted him: the puerility of expression in the two last lines is particularly unhappy; and the assertion, that *female wantonness* was the chief cause of the deluge, appears rather
 uncandid

uncandid and cruel. Let us, however, apologise for the noblest of bards, on this occasion, by observing, that he was probably misled by his reverence for a learned and holy character, as his description seems to be borrowed from the annals of Eutychius, the patriarch of Alexandria.

Though I cannot subscribe to this severity on the first female inhabitants of the world, yet, after what I have alledged, I may venture, I think, to terminate this chapter, by asserting, that from every thing which a diligent enquiry can collect on this very deep and delicate question, we have the strongest reason to suppose, there never existed such a being as an antediluvian Old Maid.

Into what blind and unjust conjectures are we poor mortals betrayed, when we attempt to estimate the constitution and character of our remote predecessors!—I had just closed the preceding speculation against the existence of an antediluvian Old Maid, when I was agreeably surpris'd by the arrival

rival of a packet from a learned friend, who had promised to collect for me, in his travels over Europe and Asia, every scrap of antiquity that could afford me any light in my maiden researches. Although the favour which I have now received from him abundantly proves, that I was grossly mistaken in my conjectural account of antediluvian virginity, I shall suffer what I had written to stand, as a warning to future antiquarians, not to indulge themselves in such hasty decisions.

I cannot more strongly express my zeal for the sisterhood, than by presenting to them, with a sincere delight, this very choice morsel of antediluvian history, which destroys my hypothesis, and by thus asserting their primæval honour, at the expence of my own historical sagacity.— My friend, the learned traveller, writes me word from Spain, which he is now visiting on his return, that as soon as he reaches England, he shall correct for the press a journal of his tour; that in a supplement
to

to his travels, he intends to insert some other ancient tracts, which he has fortunately rescued from oblivion; that he will there recount the incidents which led to their discovery, and clearly prove that the fragment, with which he has favoured me, must have proceeded from the pen of Enoch himself. He assures me, that he has sent a most faithful translation; and that he can demonstrate, by unanswerable arguments, that this fragment was contained among those very writings of Enoch which the pious Tertullian declared he had perused, and from which the celebrated Postellus confessed he had borrowed very freely, in his elaborate treatise on the origin of things.

But I shall wave all farther preface, that I may no longer detain the reader from a precious and interesting moral tale of the most eminent author that existed before the deluge.

“ And among the ninety and three
“ daughters of Enoch, there was none like
“ Kunaza:

" * Kunaza: she was beautiful, but de-
 " spised her beauty; she was nimble as the
 " deer, yet delighted not in the dance.

" She looked with pity on those who
 " trusted in the fleeting pleasures of the
 " earth.

" She saw that love was poisoned with
 " jealousy, and that marriage was embittered by strife.

" Her soul was enamoured of heavenly
 " contemplation, and she said to her father,

" O my father, permit me to live and to
 " die a virgin! Conduct me through life by
 " the light of thy spirit, and teach me to
 " walk with thee in the way of our Creator!

* NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

I am inclined to suppose, that the name of this interesting personage, Kunaza, has been mis-spelt, in the haste of transcription, and that it ought to be written Kanaza, which signifies, in the Arabic language, to deposit as a treasure; a signification that the word might naturally acquire, from the singular history of the maiden, whose name it originally was—as we use the verb *to bestor*, from the old Trojan hero.

" And

“ And her father rejoiced in the purity
“ of his child ; but the kindred of Kunaza
“ held her continence in derision.

“ They said to her, There is no plant
“ that beareth not seed, and no creature
“ that doth not produce young :

“ Thou wilt be the only fruitless thing
“ upon the face of the earth ; and when
“ thou departest, there will be none to la-
“ ment thee.

“ But Kunaza disregarded their scoffs ;
“ and in the two hundred and ninety-first
“ year of her age, she rejected the last offer
“ that was made to her of marriage.

“ Now it happened at this time, that the
“ angels appointed to watch the earth for-
“ got their duty :

“ They saw that women were beautiful ;
“ and they burned with impure desires for
“ the daughters of men :

“ They prospered in their career of un-
“ cleanness : they made the earth a scene
“ of abomination :

“ They

" They begot a multitude of giants;
 " and they boasted of their enormities.

" For Semiexas, the prince of the licen-
 " tious angels, commanded twenty of their
 " chiefs to appear before him :

" And they bound themselves by an
 " oath to assemble together on the ninth
 " night of every new year, and to recount,
 " in order, the feats of their impurity.

" And they assembled on the summit of
 " a mountain, which was called Hermo-
 " niim, or the Mountain of the Oath.

" But the moon hid her head, and the
 " stars refused to witness the vaunts of
 " their uncleanness.

" And they rejoiced in the darkness
 " which their discourse engendered, because
 " their deeds had been evil.

" And Semiexas, their prince, first re-
 " lated the evil which he had done :

" And Atarkuph related the evil which
 " he had done :

" And Arakiel related the evil which he
 " had done :

“ And Chababiel related the evil which
“ he had done :

“ And Sapfick related the evil which he
“ had done.

“ And of the twenty impure spirits, one
“ only continued silent, and the silent one
“ was Pharmarus.

“ And their prince Semiexas was offend-
“ ed by his silence, and commanded him
“ to speak.

“ And Pharmarus looked up with a
“ look of indignant derision, and he said :

“ Ye are spirits of low ambition ; ye are
“ contented with the shadow of victory,
“ where there is no resistance.

“ But I rejoice to contend with reluc-
“ tant caprice : I delight to triumph over
“ the coy maiden, over the maiden of much
“ delay, and of many excuses.

“ And as he spake, there arose from
“ the assembly of angels a noisy burst of
“ insurmountable laughter.

“ The mountain was shaken to its base
“ by the shout of their derision.

“ And

" And Semiexas their prince exclaimed:
 " O Pharmarus, inventor of magic ! O
 " thou dealer in dark things ! Is there
 " verily such a maiden upon the face of the
 " earth ?

" And Pharmarus answered, and said : O
 " thou prince of the impassioned angels, I
 " wonder not that thou art slow to believe
 " me :

" For thou hast met with no female, that
 " could resist thy perfection. The beauty
 " of woman has yielded unto thee, as the
 " soft air yieldeth to the imperious wing of
 " the eagle.

" But attend, and I will impart to you
 " the wonderful things I have discovered
 " among the daughters of men.

" As we ourselves have panted for the
 " pleasures of earth, as we have burnt for
 " the enjoyments of corporeal existence ;

" So has woman also had the ambition to
 " exchange her nature, and to cloath her-
 " self in the perfection of spirit.

" I fought the embraces of Kunaza, the

“ maiden daughter of Enoch ; but though
“ the prime of her youth is departed, she
“ disdainfully turned from my intreaty.

“ She has renounced the delights of her
“ nature ; she has determined to give her
“ virginity to the grave. Yet in time she
“ shall accede to my wishes ; for I have
“ studied the weakneses of woman.

“ Her principal weakneses are four ;
“ and I will make an experiment on the in-
“ fluence of each.

“ I will awaken her pride ; and that
“ alone may tempt her to unite with Phar-
“ marus.

“ I will excite her avarice ; and she may
“ then be eager to give her beauty in ex-
“ change for the glittering spoils of the
“ earth.

“ I will stimulate her desire ; and her
“ powers of resistance will melt away.

“ I will inflame her curiosity ; and what
“ is there, which the maiden who thirsts for
“ a secret, will not give to obtain it ?

“ I swear,

“ I swear, by the subtlety of the serpent,
 “ she shall not escape from my passion.

“ I will triumph over the coy perversity
 “ of the virgin, or I will shake this round
 “ earth to its centre.

“ And the prince Semiexas answered, and
 “ said ; Well hast thou spoken, Pharmarus,
 “ thou inventor of magic ! thy speech is
 “ worthy of thyself, thou dealer in occult
 “ machinations !

“ Go ! and prosper in thy devices ! and
 “ when we next assemble, divert us with
 “ the relation of thy success.

“ He spoke ; he dissolved the assembly ;
 “ and Pharmarus departed from his fel-
 “ lows.

“ He departed to employ himself alone
 “ in the evil, of which he intended to
 “ vaunt in their next meeting ; but he was
 “ doomed to meet them no more.

“ And now he pondered in solitude on
 “ various wiles : he exerted all the subtlety
 “ of his spirit to circumvent the virgin.

“ He approached her under the guise of

“ a friend ; he became familiar with the
“ maiden in the shape of an instructor.

“ She listened with avidity to his know-
“ ledge ; her understanding feasted on the
“ wonders he revealed : and it happened
“ on a certain day, while he conversed with
“ her on the art of divination, that Phar-
“ marus suddenly exclaimed :

“ O, Kunaza, thou art yet to learn, that
“ on this day thy sister Kezia has brought
“ a young Anack (or giant) into the
“ world.

“ The wonders of nature are worth the
“ attention of the wise : let us hasten to the
“ tent of thy sister ; let us examine how
“ she has improved, by her travail, the little
“ race of the earth.

“ And Kunaza arose with Pharmarus,
“ and she hastened to the tent of her sister :

“ And behold all things had happened
“ as Pharmarus had foretold to Kunaza.

“ For Kezia, the seventieth daughter of
“ Enoch, had conceived by Semiexas, the
“ prince of the licentious angels. She had
“ brought

“ brought him a male child ; and this was
 “ the first Anack that was born upon the
 “ earth.

“ And Kunaza beheld the infant, and
 “ she was astonished in surveying its sta-
 “ ture.

“ She embraced the babe with amaze-
 “ ment, and she delighted in the magnitude
 “ of its limbs !

“ And she delivered the babe to its mo-
 “ ther Kezia, and she observed the proud
 “ transport of the mother, in contemplating
 “ the dimensions of the child.

“ And the first temptation of Pharmarus
 “ began to work in the bosom of Kunaza ;
 “ and her heart said in secret to itself, How
 “ pleasant a thing it must be, to look with
 “ the eyes of a mother on the smiling face of
 “ a young giant !

“ And Pharmarus read all her inmost
 “ thoughts ; he exulted, and burned to be
 “ alone with the virgin.

“ And he prevailed on Kunaza to walk

C 4 “ abroad

“ abroad from the tent of her sister, that he
“ might shew her some latent wonders of
“ the creation.

“ And as he walked by the side of the
“ maiden, he strove to fan the rising wish
“ she had felt, to experience the proud de-
“ lights of a parent.

“ But the mind of the maiden had ar-
“ gued with itself; and these were the dic-
“ tates of her mind :

“ O Kunaza, make use of thy reason !
“ and resist the temptation of pride, which
“ is founded upon folly !

“ Of the ninety and three daughters of
“ thy father, there is not one who may not
“ bring forth a young Anack.

“ Couldst thou be proud of what the
“ most foolish of thy sex may accomplish ?
“ of a work in which fools may excel ?

“ O Kunaza, if thou wert destined by thy
“ nature to feel the weakness of pride, let
“ thy pride at least be confined to a venial
“ exultation in the excellence of thy spirit !

“ And

“ And Pharmarus read these unuttered
 “ words in her soul ; and he saw that she
 “ would not fall by the influence of pride.

“ And he now laboured to tempt her
 “ with treasures, and to bribe her into
 “ compliance with his desire.

“ He offered her a metal, whose po-
 “ lished splendor should emulate the sun ;
 “ and a stone, whose lustre should contend
 “ with the brilliancy of her eyes.

“ He exclaimed, O Kunaza, give thyself
 “ to Pharmarus, and he will make thee to
 “ be called the richest among women.

“ But the subtle angel could not raise for
 “ a moment the base passion of avarice in
 “ the noble heart of Kunaza.

“ The maiden answered, and said, The
 “ true wealth of a woman is peace of spirit,
 “ and her brightest ornaments are modesty
 “ and meekness.

“ And Pharmarus marvelled at her dis-
 “ cretion ; and he was inwardly vexed with
 “ a great vexation.

“ But he suppressed the murmur of dis-
 “ appointment,

“ appointment, and hastily engaged in new
“ stratagems against the maiden.

“ And as he still walked in converse
“ with Kunaza, he stopped beneath the in-
“ viting shade of a majestic palm.

“ And he said, Thou intelligent maiden,
“ who delightest in the history of the earth,
“ attend, and I will instruct thee in myste-
“ rious wonders, that relate to this tree.

“ But observe its goodly growth ; and
“ observe the happy creatures that sport
“ within the ample space of its long-ex-
“ tended shadow !

“ And Kunaza surveyed the tree ; she
“ saw that it was supreme in beauty.

“ The ground beneath it was flowery, and
“ fragrant as Paradise : the most tender and
“ lovely animals of the creation were as-
“ sembled in its shade, and every animal
“ was happy with its mate.

“ O Kunaza, said the false and artful
“ Pharmarus, I will now tell thee the blef-
“ sings that belong to this spot.

“ Thou beholdest the first nuptial couch
“ of

“ of thy parents ; it was here that Eve first
 “ reclined, when the envy of the guardian
 “ spirits had expelled her from Eden.

“ It was here that she became first ac-
 “ quainted with connubial endearment; and
 “ felt herself repaid for the paradise she had
 “ left.

“ And the angel of union gave a bless-
 “ ing to the tree, under which the first mo-
 “ ther reclined :

“ He blessed the tree, and all the ground
 “ that extendeth under the shadow thereof.

“ He blessed all the creatures that sport
 “ around it: he ordained that every daugh-
 “ ter of woman, who reclines beneath its
 “ shade, shall experience unutterable joy,
 “ beyond the common joy of her sex.

“ But this blessing has been long for-
 “ gotten by the heedless offspring of man :
 “ it is a joyous secret reserved for me to
 “ impart to my beloved.

“ So spake the subtle Pharmarus; and as
 “ he spake, he infused into the wondering
 “ virgin the thrilling flame of desire.

“ The bosom of Kunaza began to heave,
“ and her breath on a sudden grew short.

“ And Pharmarus exulted in his subtlety,
“ and was preparing to complete his
“ triumph.

“ And a piercing cry was heard from
“ afar ; and Kunaza started up at the
“ sound.

“ She listened, and the cry redoubled ;
“ and Kunaza exclaimed, As sure as we
“ have life, it is the cry of a woman in
“ travail !

“ And she heard the sound a third time ;
“ and she said, Verily it is the expression of
“ that pain, which was inflicted upon wo-
“ man for listening to a subtle tempter :

“ It is a warning to the weak Kunaza.
“ I thank thee, my good angel : I feel that
“ thou hast saved me from the subtlety of
“ Pharmarus.

“ And as the virgin spoke, she sprung
“ forward, and hastened towards the place
“ from whence the cry had proceeded.

“ And Pharmarus began to pursue her ;
“ but

“ but he stopped in his pursuit, and re-
“ flected, that the influence of his temp-
“ tation was vanished from her frame.

“ He roamed in discontent about the
“ earth; and employed himself in darker
“ devices to ensnare the maiden.

“ And he sent curious gifts, which he
“ had collected from the extremities of the
“ earth, to entice the virgin again from
“ the tent of her father.

“ He promised to entertain her with all
“ the latent wonders of the creation; and
“ he drew her by magical illusion into the
“ inmost recesses of a gloomy grove.

“ He appeared to her in all his false
“ grandeur, as the prince of magic, whom
“ the elements obey as their lord, and to
“ whom light and darkness are one:

“ Whose word can render what existeth
“ invisible, and make the thing which is
“ not, appear as the thing which is.

“ And Kunaza marvelled at his powers:
“ and he took her by the hand, and said;

“ O thou maiden of angelical spirit!
“ who

“ who hast a passion to dive into the myf-
“ teries of the universe,

“ Listen to me ! Give me thy love, and
“ I will fill thy capacious mind with that
“ mysterious knowledge for which thy
“ heart panteth !

“ Thou hast upbraided me, that I seek
“ to deceive thee ; and thou hast mentioned
“ the example of thy parent Eve :

“ But I will shew thee thou deceivest
“ thyself, if thou hast courage to learn the
“ real truth from the dead.

“ Tell me, thou most angelic among the
“ daughters of men, shall I set the appari-
“ tion of thy first parent before thee ? Shall
“ I call up the departed Eve from the
“ grave, to tell thee what it truly becometh
“ all her daughters to do ?

“ And Kunaza pondered, and said,
“ Verily it would please me to see and hear
“ the departed spirit of the first woman.

“ And Pharmarus exulted, and said, My
“ soul delights in thy fellowship, O thou
“ most magnanimous of mortals !

“ And

“ And he struck the earth with his foot :
 “ the ground trembled, and was rent asunder :
 “ der :

“ From the opening thereof there issued
 “ a thick smoke, and after the smoke, there
 “ arose a venerable phantom :

“ And the phantom had the visage of
 “ Eve ; and it bowed the head and spake :

“ Deceive not thyself with false pride,
 “ O my daughter ! Let me warn thee
 “ not to live and die in a foolish ignorance
 “ of delights, which thy frame has been
 “ fashioned to enjoy !

“ Such were the words of the phantom ;
 “ and it waited not for reply, but sunk
 “ again into the earth.

“ And the face of Kunaza was covered
 “ with confusion ; and she was almost ashamed that she was yet a virgin.

“ And Pharmarus read her inmost
 “ thoughts, and exulted :

“ He saw that his illusions began to prevail over her senses ; and he continued
 “ to tempt her still farther.

“ He

“ He pressed her trembling hand, and
“ he exclaimed, Thou alone art worthy
“ amongst women to participate in the
“ deep discoveries of my spirit.

“ O blest me with thy beauty, Kunaza!
“ and I will enrich thee with a wonderful
“ power, which no mortal but thyself shall
“ possess.

“ I will enable thee to elude the ravage
“ of time ; and, when seven centuries have
“ rolled over thy head, to appear still as
“ lovely as thou art in this moment.

“ I will teach thee to make thyself invi-
“ sible with the rapidity of thought, and,
“ by passing unseen at thy pleasure, to pe-
“ netrate every secret thou canst wish to
“ discover.

“ Thus spake the insidious Pharmarus ;
“ and the curiosity of the maiden was in-
“ flamed :

“ There were many things that she
“ panted to know, and in her heart she co-
“ veted supernatural power.

“ And Pharmarus saw that his tempta-
“ tion

" tion had entered into her soul; and he

" exulted in the success of his devices.

" He continued to solicit the maiden;

" and her bosom was convulsed with a

" doubtful conflict.

" Her cheek became red as the crimson

" rose; but she threw back her head upon

" her shoulder, to avoid the flaming eyes

" of Pharmarus.

" And as the pine bendeth beneath the

" passing wind, so was the reason of Kunaza

" bowed down by the sudden gust of de-

" fire.

" She trembled in the struggle of pas-

" sions; but her virtuous spirit arose with

" new vigour, as the tree ariseth from a tran-

" sient pressure, and points directly to the

" heaven, by whose influence it prospers.

" And the soul of the maiden now com-

" muned with itself, and said:

" O Kunaza, suppress the evil ambition

" that subtlety is kindling in thy bosom.

" Pharmarus may enable thee indeed to

" elude every mortal eye; but from the

VOL. II.

D

" fight

“ fight of God and his angels, there is none
“ who can teach thee to escape.

“ Then wish not to purchase superna-
“ tural power by the sacrifice of a greater
“ good ; by losing the inestimable peace of
“ an innocent spirit.

“ And while her soul was thus commun-
“ ing with itself, every evil desire departed
“ from the purified heart of the virgin.

“ She turned her face to Pharmarus :
“ she looked on him with a look of disdain,
“ and said :

“ Away from me, thou unworthy spirit !
“ The soul of Kunaza is impowered to ab-
“ hor and deride thy insidious machina-
“ tions.

“ Thou seekest to rob me of a treasure,
“ which if I should weakly suffer thee to
“ take, all the potent spells of thy magic
“ can never restore it to the repentant
“ mourner again.

“ And the frenzy of rage and disap-
“ pointment began to swell in the soul of
“ Pharmarus.

“ He cast a furious glance upon the virgin, and said :

“ By the powers of darkness, thou art as subtle as the serpent himself. Had thy parent Eve been possessed of thy cunning, she had made the prince of tempters a fool.

“ But I swear, by the flames that burn within me, thou shalt not escape from my embrace : I will make thee the proud mother of a young giant.

“ And he grasped the virgin with the vehement grasp of outrageous desire : and she shrieked aloud in the agonies of terror.

“ And at the sound of her shriek, the angel Gabriel alighted upon the earth : Pharmarus saw him, and was abashed for a moment.

“ Then all his evil passions rekindled with double fury ; and he prepared to contend with Gabriel for the possession of Kunaza.

“ But his powers of resistance were withered

“thered by the glance of rebuke that
“flashed from the radiant visage of the pro-
“tecting spirit.

“And Gabriel seized him with the arm
“of justice and power; and exclaimed with
“mild dignity to the maiden:

“O Kunaza! thou hast fought a good
“fight; and all the faithful spirits of
“heaven are thy friends.

“Know that the seraph Uriel and I are
“sent from the throne of God to punish the
“false and licentious angels, who have de-
“based their nature with the impurities of
“the earth.

“And in honour of thy virtue, it is or-
“dained by thy Maker, Kunaza, that thy
“enemy, Pharmarus, shall fall the first
“victim to the just vengeance of heaven.

“Open, earth! and imprison in thy ca-
“verns the treacherous guardian, who has
“attempted to violate the purest of thy
“daughters!

“The earth opened to her centre, at the
“command

“ command of the avenging angel, and
 “ there, with a chain of penal fire, * * * ”

It is with great concern I inform my reader, that this invaluable fragment does not extend beyond the preceding imperfect sentence. I am persuaded, that every person of feeling, every true friend to virginity, must lament, that we are not made fully acquainted with the final destiny of the interesting Kunaza. We may, however, safely affirm, that after she had resisted so successfully all the base machinations and power of the prince of magic, she could never fall by the strength or artifice of man. I trust, therefore, that her name and character will now obtain the honour they deserve, from all the nations of the modern world ; and that the sisterhood, in particular, will never fail to revere her, as the original president of Old Maids.

C H A P. II.

✓ *Conjectures concerning Old Maids among the Jews, Egyptians, and some other Nations of Antiquity.*

IN the first centuries after the deluge, it seems to have been the wish of every individual to assist in the great business of repeopling the desolated world. At a time when a numerous progeny was considered as real opulence, and a peculiar mark of the divine favour, it is not probable that any female should have willingly precluded herself from the most envied distinction. Indeed, the Hebrew women appear to have been actuated by the most lively desire of increasing the number of their respective families. Children were regarded as such a treasure, that several wives of the patriarchs, whom nature had disappointed in this expectation, very chearfully corrected the
the

the unkindness of their own constitution, by presenting a handmaid to their husbands. Among all the Mosaic institutions, there is no trace of any order of men or women devoted to a single life; and, though some of the fathers, who have studied, in their writings, to raise the honour of monastic virginity, have affected to derive it from Miriam the sister of Moses, by asserting that she died a virgin, at the age of an hundred and thirty-three years, it is said with more probability, that this musical sister of the Jewish legislator was herself married to Hur, a man of eminence in the tribe of Judah. St. Jerome, whose zeal for chastity has sometimes transported him beyond the limits of sober reason, expresses an inclination to believe, that several women, before the Christian æra, received the gift of prophecy from God, as a reward for their living a life of virginity:—but it is remarkable, that the celebrated Hebrew prophetesses were married women. Deborah was the wife of Lapidoth; and Huldah,

whose prophecy is recorded in the 22d chapter of the second book of Kings, is not only mentioned as the wife of Shallum, but is said to have dwelt in the college of Jerusalem; a sufficient proof that virginity was not required in those females, who made a part of that hallowed institution. The heroine as well as the prophetess might contribute to the glory of her nation, without any claim to this chaste perfection. Jael, who is celebrated in a song of triumph for the slaughter of Sisera, was the wife of Heber the Kenite; and the more noble Judith, immortalised for delivering her country, by the destruction of Holofernes, was, at the time of her exploit, a young widow. Throughout the history of the Jews, from their father Abraham to their utter dispersion, I cannot recollect the existence of any one distinguished Old Maid; nor is it probable, that many ancient virgins were ever to be discovered, in a nation where every man was at liberty to marry as many wives as he thought himself able to support;

port; and where the wisest of their princes was so weak as to encumber himself with a domestic establishment of many hundred concubines.

As the Ægyptians were distinguished by a melancholy cast of temper, and a passion for gloomy retirement, we might be led to imagine, that the women of that country were the first who devoted themselves to the mortifications of religious celibacy; but there is a remarkable assertion in Herodotus, which seems to preclude us from such a conjecture. In speaking of Ægypt, he expressly says, “* no woman is ever consecrated to any Divinity, male or female, the holy office belonging solely to men;” yet the same great historian informs us, that women acted a principal part in the hallowed mysteries of this artful people; not, indeed, as we may fairly conjecture, for the purposes of chastity, as he

* *Ιεραται γυνή μὲν οὐδεμίη οὐτε ἐρσεως θεῶν, ὅτε θηλέης· ἀνδρες δὲ πάντων τε καὶ πασῶν.* Herodotus, p. 120. edit. Wessell.

says,

says, that in the temple of the Ægyptian Jupiter at Thebes, as in that of Belus at Babylon, a virgin was secluded for the God, and supposed to sleep with the Divinity himself, in a magnificent bed prepared for that purpose, in the highest apartment of the building. From this ceremony, and from other circumstances, we may conclude, that Ægypt was not very fertile in the production of Old Maids. Parents of the poorer sort sold their female children to procure subsistence for themselves; and we cannot reasonably suppose, that many ancient virgins existed in such a country, where two of its sovereigns, according to the historian I have quoted, prostituted their own daughters in the most public manner; the first, to supply his exhausted treasury; and the second, to detect a very artful thief*.

If we must not expect to find an Old Maid in Ægypt, we have still less chance of

* See the amusing story of Rhampsinitus and his daughter, in the second book of Herodotus.

meeting

meeting with this rarity among the Babylonians. This ingenious people had devised a very happy expedient, which is highly approved by Herodotus, to prevent their women's being exposed to the mortifications of a single life, by the want of personal attractions. It was their annual custom to produce all their virgins, who had attained the marriageable age, in a kind of public auction; the most beautiful were sold for considerable sums, and this purchase money was distributed in such a manner, among the homely damsels, as to procure for each of them a husband. Such a civil institution is in itself almost sufficient to have prevented the existence of an Old Maid among them; but their religious ceremonies, if we may give them credit, had still a greater tendency to produce this effect, as every woman was required, once in her life, to admit the embraces of a stranger in or near the temple of their goddess Mylitta.

In Phœnicia, where Venus and Adonis
were

were particularly worshipped, the commerce between the sexes was still more licentious. We may, indeed, observe, that among several nations of antiquity, the sacrifice of female chastity was considered as a religious duty. Persons of the highest rank among the Armenians, as we are told by Strabo, devoted their virgin daughters to the goddess Anaitis. It was their custom, that these young women should be prostituted for a considerable time in the service of their Divinity, and settled afterwards in marriage, no man refusing a matrimonial connection with such hallowed females *.

The pagan mythology was calculated to promote the most corrupt state of manners; and in some of the voluptuous nations of antiquity, the virtue of continence seems to have been utterly unknown. In Lydia, says

* Τας θυγατέρας οἱ ἐπιφανέστατοι τῶ ἐθνὸς ἀνιέρουσι παρθένας, αἷς νόμος ἐστὶ, καταπορνεύεισθαι πολὺν χρόνον παρὰ τῇ θεᾷ, μετὰ ταῦτα διδοῖσθαι πρὸς γάμον· οὐκ ἀπαξίοντος τῇ τοιαύτῃ συνισκῆναι οὐδενός. Strabo, lib. xi.

Herodotus,

Herodotus, every girl plays the harlot.— Yet, in the luxurious region of Asia, some religious institutions were established for the protection of chastity. The famous temple of Diana, at Ephesus, had a train of holy virgins; and, for their perfect security, the priests, to whose guardianship they were entrusted, were all eunuchs. Yet we cannot venture to affirm, that this sanctuary produced a number of Old Maids; for it is probable, that these young votaries of Diana, like the Vestals of Rome, whose history I shall consider hereafter, had the privilege of marrying towards the middle season of life. This we may also conjecture to have been the case with the religious virgins in Persia; who seem to have been guarded with peculiar sanctity, from an anecdote related by Justin:—Darius, the son of Artaxerxes, not satisfied with those imperial honours to which his father had raised him, demanded of that monarch his favourite mistress Aspasia. The aged sovereign, unwilling to grant, and afraid, perhaps,

perhaps, to refuse, the passionate request of his son, was reduced to a mortifying expedient for securing the lady from so dangerous a rival: he made her, for that purpose, a priestess of the Sun *. Plutarch relates this incident with some variations, but in a manner which equally shews, that chastity among the Persians was very strictly guarded in a religious asylum; yet virginity, as the story sufficiently proves, was not a necessary qualification for the character of a priestess.—Among all the kingdoms of antiquity, none, perhaps, contributed less than Persia to the sisterhood of Old Maids, as the Persians are distinguished by a peculiar ceremony, which strongly proves, that both sexes considered celibacy as an object of abhorrence, not only as an enemy to human enjoyment, but as precluding them from the happiness they expected in a future life. From this idea arose their extraordinary custom of marry-

* Justin.

ing the dead; which consisted of hiring either a husband or a wife, for every person who happened to die single, at an early period of life. This strange kind of marriage is said to have been generally solemnised, in such cases, soon after the burial of the deceased, being regarded as a necessary passport to the regions of bliss.

In Scythia, perhaps, some good Old Maids may have existed; whose single life was the consequence of their possessing a delicate frame or a tender heart; for we are told by historians, that no female, in that martial country, was permitted to marry, till she had slain, with her own hand, an enemy in battle.

Among the warlike Amazons, a very different cause might produce the same effect. As these formidable ladies made it a point of national honour to support their empire with the least possible assistance from the other sex, we may reasonably suppose, that she was considered as the truest Amazonian patriot, who united virginity
with

with valour. I must, indeed, confess, that the amorous adventures of some Amazonian queens are not very favourable to this hypothesis; but, if Quintus Curtius informs us, that Thalestris requested an embrace from Alexander, and discovered more * eagerness for amorous pleasure than the young and voluptuous hero himself, let us remember the more chaste deportment of her predecessor on the Amazonian throne, the celebrated Penthesilea, who lived and died a virgin, in the licentious court and army of Priam, during the siege of Troy. She was slain, as Quintus Calaber relates, by the inflexible Achilles; who wished, however, as the poet says, that he had married his lovely antagonist instead of killing her †. From the example of this virtuous heroine, I am persuaded, that if a

* *Acrior ad Venerem fœminæ cupido quam regis*
 Quint. Curt. lib. vi. cap. 5.

† *Και δ' Ἀχιλεὺς ἀλίαςτον ἐω ἐνετείρετο θυμῷ*

οὐνεκά μιν κατέπεφνε, καὶ οὐκ ἄγε διὰν ἀκούτιν.

Quintus Calaber, lib. i. ver. 670.

considerable

considerable number of Old Maids existed among any of those ancient people, whom the Greeks regarded as barbarians, it must have been in the nation of Amazons. I am aware, that in the profound researches of Mr. Bryant, the very existence of this nation is disputed; but, as the champion of the sisterhood in all ages, I cannot assent to this opinion of a most learned writer, nor permit the daring antiquarian to annihilate so illustrious a community, and thus, as it were, to deflower in a moment at least a million of ancient virgins.

While I contend for the existence, and the chastity, of these female warriors, who are described in the most lively and circumstantial manner by the poets and historians of antiquity, I must not forget their rivals, both in courage and continence, the Gorgons. These also were a nation of women, according to Diodorus Siculus; who informs us, that, bordering on the Amazons in Libya, and looking with envy

on their neighbours, they frequently infested their country, till the more powerful Amazons, armed in the immense skins of African serpents, and led to battle by their queen Merina, subdued the Gorgons in a severe engagement, in which they took three thousand prisoners *.

I must own, that many contradictory opinions have been held concerning these more doubtful heroines, the Gorgons. Some critics have considered them as lovely young women, whose beauty was so powerful as to fix every beholder in motionless amazement ; others have supposed them to have been frightful old hags, whose deformity was so hideous, that no one could look at them without shuddering ; and some late writers, with a sceptical refinement, have denied their human existence, and believed them to have been those celebrated mares of Africa, who were said to conceive by the south wind. But, to sup-

* Diodorus Siculus, lib. iii. cap. 4.

port the ancient dignity of the sisterhood, I shall adhere to the evidence of that very respectable old Grecian, Palæphatus, who wrote a treatise expressly to explain the poetical riddles of his country; in which he explicitly declares, that the three princely Gorgon sisters, Stheno, Euryale, and Medusa, were three voluntary Old Maids.

* Κορας τρεις Σθενω, Ευρυαλην, και Μεδουσαν. Αυται
 μιν γαμασθαι ουδενι εβουληθησαν. Palæphatus.

C H A P. III.

On the Old Maids of Greece.

IN those ages which are honoured with the name of heroic, virgins seem to have been treated with very little respect. Every hero appears to have thought himself entitled to the careffes of the maiden captives, whom his own prowess, or the chance of war, had placed within his power; and the venerable Nestor, at the age of fourscore and five, does not retire to sleep without that agreeable reward of ancient heroism, a fair and affectionate damsel. The warm and enthusiastic admiration with which critics of the most liberal spirit have contemplated the genius of Homer, has led some of them to assert, that his poems are so wonderfully comprehensive, as to include every character which human life can exhibit.

But

But this praise may be considered as hyperbolic; since it is certain, that we cannot discover, either in the Iliad or the Odyssey, a portrait, or even a sketch, of a single Old Maid. Perhaps, as this immortal bard is so minutely faithful in his delineation of manners and customs, we might infer, that no such character existed in his time; and indeed, the more we reflect on the religious and political institutions of Greece, the more reason shall we find to believe, that the number of Grecian Old Maids must have been at all periods very inconsiderable.

It was the ruling passion of the Greeks to aggrandize their country; and, as they justly considered citizens as the real wealth of every state, they thought it the first of patriotic duties, equally incumbent on both the sexes, to enrich the republic by increasing its numbers. Plato carries this point so far as to say, that "all persons, in the article of marriage, ought to consult the service of the public, in preference to
E 3 "their

“ their own private enjoyment *.” The
 same illustrious philosophic statesman pro-
 poses a heavy tax upon those who conti-
 nued single beyond the age of thirty-three.
 Such a tax is said to have existed at Sparta,
 where every public institution had a pecu-
 liar tendency to encourage population.
 “ Their public dances ” (says Plutarch)
 “ and other exercises of the young maidens
 “ naked, in sight of the young men, were in-
 “ centives to marriage ; and, to use Plato’s
 “ expression, drew them almost as neces-
 “ sarily by the attractions of love, as a ge-
 “ ometrical conclusion follows from the
 “ premises. To encourage it still more,
 “ some marks of infamy were set upon
 “ those that continued batchelors ; for they
 “ were not permitted to see these exercises
 “ of the naked virgins, and the magistrates
 “ commanded them to march naked round
 “ the market-place in the winter, and to

* Κατα παντος εις εστω μυθος γαμου : τον γαρ τη πο-
 λει δεi συμφεροντα μισηστευειν γαμον εκαστον, ου τον ηδιστον
 αυτω. Plato de Legibus, lib. vi.

“ sing

“ sing a song composed against themselves,
 “ which expressed how justly they were
 “ punished for their disobedience to the
 “ laws *.”

Athenæus informs us, that their punishment was still more severe ; and that, on a certain festival, these unprofitable servants of the state were dragged round an altar, and beaten, by the women of Lacedæmon, that their pride might be awakened by this indignity, and incline them to become husbands and fathers †.

In a country where such customs prevailed, it is not probable that many women should have declined the most important of public duties, for the sake of securing to themselves the dishonourable tranquillity of a single life. Indeed, we must do them the justice to observe, that the ladies of Greece

* Life of Lycurgus, in Langhorne's Plutarch.

† Εν Λακεδαιμονι φησι τες αγαμης αι γυναικες εν εορτη
 τινι περι του βωμου ελκυσσαι ραπιζουσιν, ινα την εκ τω πραγ-
 ματος υβριν φευγοντες, φιλοστοργωσι τε και εν ωρα προσιωσι
 τεις γαμους. Athenæus, lib. xiii.

appear to have been, in this point, the sincerest of patriots : it seems to have been their general sentiment, that to live and die unmarried was the most humiliating disgrace and affliction that the Destinies could inflict.

*O the guilty bed
Of those from whom I sprang ! unhappy offspring*

*Of parents most unhappy ! lo ! to them
I go accurs'd, a virgin and a slave *.*

*— — — — —
Ne'er shall I taste of Hymen's joys, or know
A mother's pleasures in her infant race ;
But, friendless and forlorn, alive descend
Into the dreary mansions of the dead †.*

Franklin's Sophocles.

Such

* Ἰὼ ματρῶναι λεκτρῶν
Αἰται, κοιμηματ' αὐτογενήτα
Ἀμῷ πατρὶ δυσμορῆ ματρός,
Οἶων ἐγὼ ποθ' αὐτὰλαιφρῶν ἐφύν.
Πρὸς ἧς ἀγῆαιος, ἀγάμος α-
Δ' ἐγὼ μετοίκος ἐρχομαι.

Antigone, ver. 875.

† Καὶ νῦν ἀγῆ με διὰ χερῶν ἠτῶ λαβὼν,
Ἀλεκτρῶν, ἀνυμναίων, ἕτε τε γὰρ μὲν

Μεγας

Such is the natural and pathetic lamentation with which the interesting Antigone of Sophocles prepares for death.—This great and judicious poet has given exactly the same sentiment to his more fiery Electra; who, at the time she is mourning for her murdered father, and meditating the most tremendous vengeance against her imperious and guilty mother, cannot refrain from lamenting that she is herself

Hopeless of children, and of nuptial rites.*

So prevalent was this idea in the mind of every Grecian female.—Euripides carries it still farther, and assigns similar language to *his* Electra; though he represents her as

Μερος λαχυσαν, ὅτε παιδεῖν τροφῆς,
 Ἀλλ' ὡδ' ἐρημος πρὸς φίλων ἢ δυσμορος,
 Ζωσ' εἰς θανόντων ἐρχομαι κατασκαφᾶς.

Ver. 928.

* Ἀτεκνος

Ταλαιν', ἀνυμφευτος αἰὲν οἰχυνῶ.

Sophoclis Electra, ver. 166.

actually married, by the tyranny of her parents, to an honest labourer, who generously abstains from her bed in deference to her rank.

From these examples we may conclude, that a Grecian female hardly ever expressed an inclination to become an Old Maid; and indeed, whatever her own private wishes might be, the iniquitous laws of her country made her so much the slave of her relations, that she had little or no power of fixing her own situation in life. “ Nothing (says the accomplished Sir William Jones, in speaking of Grecian laws that relate to women) “ nothing can be conceived more cruel “ than the state of vassalage, in which women were kept by the polished Athenians; who might have boasted of their tutelar goddess, Minerva, but had certainly no pretensions, on any account, to the patronage of Venus. All unnecessary restraints upon love (which contributes so largely to relieve the anxieties of a laborious life) and upon marriage “ (which

“ (which conduces so eminently to the peace
 “ and good order of society) are odious in
 “ the highest degree; yet at Athens, whence
 “ arts, laws, humanity, learning, and reli-
 “ gion, are said to have sprung, a girl
 “ could not be legally united with the ob-
 “ ject of her affection, except by the con-
 “ sent of the *Kyrios* or controller, who was
 “ either her father or her grandfire, her
 “ brother or her guardian: their domination
 “ over her was transferred to the husband,
 “ by whom she was usually confined to the
 “ minute details of domestic œconomy;
 “ and from whom she might in some in-
 “ stances be torn, for the sake of her fortune,
 “ by a second cousin, whom probably she
 “ detested. Nor was her dependence likely
 “ to cease; for we may collect from the
 “ speech on the estate of Philoctemon, that
 “ even a widow was at the disposal of her
 “ nearest kinsman; either to be married by
 “ him, or to be given in marriage, accord-
 “ ing to his inclination or caprice. Yet
 “ more; a husband might bequeath his
 “ wife,

“ wife, like part of his estate, to any man
 “ whom he chose for his successor : and the
 “ mother of Demosthenes was actually left
 “ by will to Aphobus, with a portion of
 “ eighty minas. The form of such a be-
 “ quest is preserved in the first speech
 “ against Stephanus ; and runs thus : “ This
 “ is the last will of Pasio the Acharnean.
 “ I give my wife Archippe to Phormio, with
 “ a fortune of one talent in Peparrhetus, one
 “ talent in Attica, a house worth a hundred
 “ minas, together with the female slaves,
 “ the ornaments of gold, and whatever else
 “ may be in it.”—For all these hardships
 “ which the Athenian women endured, a
 “ very poor compensation was made by
 “ the law of Solon, which ordered their
 “ husbands to sleep with them three times
 “ a month *.”

In a country where women, at every pe-
 riod of their life, were so miserably depen-
 dent as to be disposed of like inanimate pro-

* Jones's Commentary on Isæus, page 177.

perty, we have reason to apprehend their having suffered every species of cruelty and oppression. If Greece did not abound in voluntary Old Maids, we may believe that some lovely females of that celebrated region were kept in a wretched state of celibacy, by the iniquity of a tyrannical parent or guardian. If a superstitious and cowardly old father happened to dream that a grand-child would prove fatal to his peace, he probably imitated the absurd precaution of Acrisius, and attempted to confine his daughter, like Danae, in a *subterranean chamber on a bed of brass**; since cowardice and superstition are not to be corrected by the instructive history of that beautiful captive, and old men are even yet to learn, that female chastity is more endangered than protected by a rigorous confinement.

However frequent such examples of parental persecution may have been among the

* Καταγαιον οικοδομημα, επ' αυτο δε ην ο χαλκους θαλαμος. Pausanias, p. 164.

Greeks,

Greeks, we do not find many traces of them in the history of that interesting, capricious people. There is indeed an amusing anecdote in Herodotus, which may serve to shew, that parents used to threaten their children with the dreaded continuance of a virgin life. Polycrates of Samos, being angry with his daughter for opposing his visit to the Persian noble, Orætes, because she had been alarmed by a terrific vision, threatens the affectionate but teasing girl, that if he returns in safety, she shall for a long time remain a virgin; to which she replies with great filial tenderness, by praying that his threat may be accomplished, since she would rather remain a virgin * *some time longer*, than be utterly deprived of her father.

We may, however, believe that parental tyranny was not so often exercised in attempts to keep a daughter single, as in those of marrying her to a person she abhorred. Perhaps in the latter case there was the greater

* Πλεω χρόνον. Herodotus, lib. iii.

probability of her becoming an Old Maid; not from the spirit of contradiction, but because an unhappy girl, so persecuted, had no resource to shield her from a detested marriage, but the sacred altar of some maidenly power, who offered an asylum to virgins in distress.

That such places of refuge existed, we have a very striking proof in a passage of that singular poem, the Cassandra of Lycophron. The prophetess, in the midst of her misfortunes, breaks forth into the following declaration of her future glory :

*Nor among mortals shall my name become
 Extinct, and in Lethean darkness lost :
 To me the Daunian chiefs, and those who dwell
 Within the walls of marshy Dardanus,
 Shall build a temple upon Salpe's banks ;
 There shall the virgins, whensoever they wish
 To fly the marriage yoke, averse to join
 With suitors, vain of their Hæctorean locks *,
 Or*

* It is worthy of observation, that Cassandra considers personal vanity in a man, as a blemish not inferior

*Or mark'd with some defect of form or birth,
There shall they fold my image in their arms,
Their firmest guard from nuptial tyranny *.*

I think it proper to add, that Cassandra, in promising this asylum to persecuted virgins, mentions a circumstance, which might lessen, perhaps, the influence of her protection : she declares, that her chaste votaries

ferior to deformity. As to Hecstorean locks, the learned are not perfectly agreed on the manner in which the hair of Hector was dressed : but the ingenious editor of Lycophron seems to have fairly proved, that the Trojan hero set the fashion of wearing a *toupee*.

- * Οὐ μὲν ἐμὸν ἰωνυμὸν ἀνθρώποις σέβας
ἔσται, μαραινέειν αὐτὶ ληθαίω σκοτῶ·
Ναὸν δὲ μοι τεύχεσσι Δαυνίων ἀκροῖ
Σαλπῆς παρ' ὀχθαῖς, οἱ τε Δαρδανὸν πόλιν
Ναῖεσι, λίμνης ἀγχιτερμονέες ποτῶν.
Κεραὶ δὲ παρθενέειον ἐκφυγεῖν ζυγόν
Ὅταν θέλωσι, νυμφίους ἀρτουμεναὶ
Τῆς Ἑκτορείαις ἡγλαίσμενης κόμαις,
Μορφῆς ἐχόντας σιφλόν, ἢ μῶμαρ γενέας,
Ἐμὸν περιπλῦξασιν ὠλεναῖς βρεταῖς,
Ἀλκαρ μέγιστον κτῶμεναὶ νυμφευμάτων.

Lycophron, ver. 1126.

must

must disfigure their faces with a medical lotion, and dress themselves in the habit of the Furies. Whether, after annexing this condition to her patronage, she was likely or not to have many virgins in her sanctuary, is a point that I submit to the judgment of the ladies: observing, however, that none of my fair readers are proper judges of the question, except those, who have been persecuted by the addresses of a very odious suitor.

From the preceding part of this chapter, some readers of a sceptical cast may be inclined to doubt, if Greece ever produced an Old Maid. But if the testimony of a poet may be admitted, the question is explicitly decided. That the character really existed at Athens, we are expressly informed by Aristophanes, in a verse which I have adopted as a motto to this Essay; and which, for the sake of my curious fair readers, I shall now translate: endeavouring, at the same time, to collect as much light as I can from its comic author, con-

cerning the real condition of Attic Old Maids.

In the comedy, which bears the name of *Lyfistrata*, that lady conceives the lively project of instructing her own sex to obtain an absolute dominion over the men; and to force them into a conclusion of those wars, by which Greece was perpetually distracted. As she proposes her pacific expedient with more wit than modesty, my fair readers will undoubtedly approve my delicacy in not giving them a minute account of it; and the more so, as it is sufficient for our present purpose to observe, that *Lyfistrata*, after touching on the vexations that war produces to married women, proceeds to the following sentiment of disinterested compassion:

*But let us wave OUR GRIEVANCES:—I
grieve
For virgins in their chambers waxing old*.*

* ————— Καθ' ἑμῆτερον μὲν ἐατέ.

Περὶ τῶνδε κορῶν ἐν τοῖς θαλαμοῖς γηρασκῶσιν ἀνωμαί.

It

It is very remarkable, that although Lyfistrata thus mentions the Old Maids as objects of her sollicitude, the poet does not venture to introduce upon the stage a single ancient virgin, either in this play, or in a drama, where he had, I think, a still fairer occasion to display the character with all his licentious vivacity: I mean his comedy of the *Female Orators* *. A very short account of this witty, but indecent composition, will be sufficient to shew, that an Old Maid might have appeared among the persons of the drama with a very comic effect. Aristophanes undoubtedly intended, in this comedy, to ridicule the political whimsies of Plato, who contends, in his Republic, that property and women should be possessed in common. The poet exhibits, with infinite humour, the ludicrous evils arising from such a system. The women of Athens usurp the government; and Praxagora, the heroine of the comedy, adopting

* ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΖΟΥΣΑΙ.

the ideas of Plato, establishes a new set of laws. I shall speak only of that which relates to my subject. By one of her statutes, “ it is enacted, that no young man shall receive the favours of a young woman, till he has first gratified the inclinations of an old one.” The modern reader might expect the poet to introduce, after this incident, even a *chorus of Old Maids*; but, licentious as he was, Aristophanes had more respect for the sisterhood. It is true, indeed, that he brings some ancient ladies on the stage, and represents them not a little solicitous to take advantage of a law so express in their favour; but they are very far from appearing in the character of Old Maids, as one of them gives us clearly to understand, that she has no claim to that title.

I would by no means insinuate, that the remarkable conduct of Aristophanes, in not exhibiting an Old Maid, might tempt us to suspect, that no such character existed in his time. The only inference I would draw from

from it is this: that the Old Maids of Athens were either entirely sequestered from society, or guarded with such a religious veneration, as the most licentious of comic poets presumed not to violate. That such personages really existed, I not only think the speech of *Lyfistrata* a sufficient proof; but I apprehend their condition, as she intimates, was owing to the frequency of war among the Grecian republics.

How far the women of this martial country considered themselves as neglected and aggrieved by that contentious spirit, which detained their warriors in distant fields of battle, we have a memorable example in the following very singular anecdote recorded by *Strabo*.

“ To revenge the death of their king,
 “ *Teleclus*, who was slain as he went to sacrifice at *Messena*, the *Lacedæmonians*
 “ engaged in a war against the *Messenians*,
 “ and took an oath, either that they would
 “ not return home till they had taken

F 3

Messena,

“ Messena, or that they would all die in
“ the attempt.

“ In marching forth to this enterprize,
“ they left only their very young and very
“ old citizens to guard their own city. After
“ the tenth year of the war, the women of
“ Lacedæmon assembled, and sent a depu-
“ tation of their own sex to the army, to
“ reprove the men, as not engaging on
“ equal terms with the Messenians; since
“ these, remaining in their own country,
“ were still producing children; while they,
“ who had left their women desolate, were
“ encamped in a state of hostility, at the
“ risk of letting their own country decay
“ by a deficiency of men. The Lacedæ-
“ monians still respecting their oath, and
“ considering at the same time the argu-
“ ment of the women, detached from the
“ army the youngest and most vigorous of
“ their countrymen, who did not violate an
“ engagement by their return; since, while
“ they were yet boys, they had marched
“ from

“ from home with the band of young men.
 “ This detachment was directed to con-
 “ nect themselves with the virgins at La-
 “ cedæmon, all with all, for the greater
 “ chance of increasing population *. To
 “ those

* Προσεταιξαν δε συγγενεσθαι ταις παρθενοις απασαις
 απαντας, ηγουμενοι πολυτεκνησειν μαλλον. Strabo, lib. vi.

I have literally followed Strabo in this singular his-
 tory: but as it is related also by Justin, with some va-
 riations, I shall insert his account of it in this note,
 for the satisfaction of the curious reader, “ His
 “ igitur moribus ita brevi civitas (*Lacedæmon*) con-
 “ valuit, ut cum Messeniis, propter stupratas virgines
 “ suas, in solenni Messeniorum sacrificio bellum in-
 “ tulissent, gravissima se execratione obstrinxerint,
 “ non, prius quam Messenam expugnassent, reverfu-
 “ ros; tantum sibi vel de viribus suis, vel de for-
 “ tuna, spondentes. Quæ res initium dissentionis
 “ Græciæ, et intestini belli causa et origo fuit. Ita-
 “ que cum, contra pæsumptionem suam, annis decem
 “ in obsidione urbis tenerentur, et querelis uxorum
 “ post tam longam viduitatem revocarentur; veriti
 “ ne hac perseverantia belli gravius sibi quam Messe-
 “ niis nocerent—quippe illis quantum juventutis
 “ bello intercidat, mulierum fœcunditate suppleri;
 “ sibi

“ those who were born from this connexion,
 “ they gave the title of “ Partheneiai,” the
 “ offspring of virgins.”

In a state, where the women could present so tender, so patriotic, and so successful a remonstrance to their absent heroes, we cannot, I think, reasonably suppose that the number of Old Maids was very considerable. Perhaps in this point, as in all others of delicacy and refinement, Sparta was confessedly inferior to Athens. As the latter was more eminently distinguished by the patronage of the virgin goddess Minerva, we may justly believe her to have furnished

“ sibi et belli damna assidua, et fecunditatem uxorum,
 “ absentibus viris, nullam esse—itaque legunt
 “ juvenes ex eo genere militum qui post jusjurandum
 “ in supplementum venerant, quibus, Spartam remissis,
 “ promiscuos omnium feminarum concubitus
 “ permiscere; maturiorem futuram conceptionem rati,
 “ si eam singulæ per plures viros experirentur. Ex
 “ his nati, ob notam materni pudoris, Partheniæ
 “ vocati.”

Justin. lib. iii. c. 4.

to her guardian deity the more numerous train of ancient and immaculate votaries.

The mythological descriptions of the Grecian poets are generally founded on some historical fact; and the poem of Nonnus contains a very remarkable passage, which almost persuades me, that the women of Greece, at some early and obscure period of their history, were so vehemently devoted to the arts of Minerva, that they neglected or renounced the more interesting rites of Venus, and almost endangered the continuance of the world. As the passage, to which I allude, has the advantage of exhibiting Venus in a new point of view, it may amuse the reader to see it at full length. The poet having informed us that his hero, Bacchus, gave a banquet to his attendants, proceeds thus:

** To this gay audience, as the goblet pass'd,
Leucus the self-taught Lesbian fram'd the song
Of Titans arm'd 'gainst Heaven: joyous he sung*

† Τοῖσι δὲ τερπόμενοισι, &c. Nonni Dionys. lib. 24.

The

*The triumph of high-judging Jove; and how
In the dark caves of Tartarus he pent
Old Saturn, stealing his avenging fire,
And vainly cas'd in winter's watery helm.*

*But mild Lapethus, earth's pacific son,
Sat near the skilful bard; and from the feast
Gave him the choicest dainty: then requir'd
The sweet and favourite song, that well de-
scribes*

*The Cyprian Goddess at the loom employ'd,
And vying with the blue-eyed Queen of Arts.*

*He with sweet prelude sung, how Venus,
touch'd*

*With passion for the works of manual skill,
Held in unpractis'd hands Minerva's web,
And the light cestus of the Loves exchange'd
For the laborious shuttle. Coarse the thread
The Paphian Goddess spun—scarce of less size
Than the gross cordage, which of willow
fram'd*

*With some rude art, the old mechanic us'd
To splice the timber of his new-built bark.
She thro' the day, and thro' the night, intent
Hung o'er the loom of Pallas, and rejoic'd*

In

In the new labour, foreign to her hand.

*Frequent she smooth'd the vest; and having
 pois'd*

*The dangling weights, her growing web she
 plied,*

Sollicitous to play Minerva's part.

Nor trifling was her toil: but in her work

The massive thread projected: of itself

The woof of her enormous texture broke.

And of her double labour now she made

The sun a witness, and the conscious moon.

Part of her sportive train around her danc'd

Amusive: with a gay and rapid band

Pasiphae turn'd the wheel; while Pitho's care

*Smooth'd the rough wool; and sweet Aglaia's
 zeal*

Gave to their common Queen the ready thread.

Now mortal life declin'd, and harmony,

Once the glad harbinger of bridal joy,

Mourn'd the neglect of marriage — hopeless

Love

Loos'd from his bow his ineffectual string,

Viewing the barren unplough'd field of life.

No dulcet flute then sounded, no shrill pipe

Usher'd

*Usher'd with festive glee the Nuptial God;
But earthly being wasted, and the chain
Of wedlock, that sustains the world, dissolv'd.*

*Minerva now her busy rival saw;
In anger mix'd with tenderness she view'd
The thick rough threads of the unskilful fair:
Now she inform'd the Gods, and spoke in scorn
Accusing Venus, and her father Jove:—*

" Thy ordinance is chang'd, Celestial Sire!

" Nor can I keep what all the Fates conspir'd

" To make my portion: tempted by my loom,

" Thy daughter Venus now invades my right.

" 'Tis not the sister and the wife of Jove,

" 'Tis not our sovereign Juno, that usurps

" Minerva's province: no; this wrong is

" done

" To the immortal Patroness of Arms

" By the soft Queen of Dalliance. For thy

" Heaven

" When did th' unwarlike Cytherea fight?

" Where are the Titans by her cestus slain,

" That she insults thy warrior?—Dian! say,

" When in the centre of thy sacred grove

" Hast

"Hast thou beheld Minerva lead the chase?
 "Or who in child-birth calls the Blue-eyed
 "Queen?"

She spoke, and the inhabitants of Heaven
 Assembled, eager for the wondrous sight
 Of Venus at the loom.—Soon as they saw
 The produce of her hand, unus'd to toil,
 Scornful they roll'd the spurious work aside,
 And with a smile sarcastic Hermes said:

"Thine is the distaff: to Minerva leave
 "Thy useless cestus!—Since thy arm has
 "Strength

"Nimble to dart the flying shuttle, take

"The spear and ægis of the Martial Maid!

"I know why Venus plies th' applauded loom:

"Thy wiles escape not me—thy bridegroom

"Mars

"Quick from thy hand with amorous haste

"requires

"A vest of nuptial elegance:—for Mars

"Form the rich robe; but in thy recent work

"Weave not the lance, for what are arms to

"thee?

"No! let thy variegated tints display

"The

" The Light-dispersing God, whose beams re-

" veal'd

" Thy latent paramour: or, if thou wilt,

" Frame thy old chains, and let thy modest hand

" Paint in thy glowing web thy spurious lord!

" And thou too, Love, a distaff for thy arms,

" For thy laborious mother twist the yarn,

" That I may see the light-wing'd boy at work,

" His bow a spindle, and his dart a thread!

" With golden Venus 'broider Mars in gold;

" And let him bear a shuttle for his shield,

" Weaving himself with Beauty's busy Queen!

" But rather, Venus, from thy lovely hand

" Toss to the wind thy threads!—thy cestus

" take,

" And o'er th' enjoyments of the earth again

" Preside! for nature suffers, and the world

" Wanders forlorn, while thou art at the loom."

Thus as he spoke th' Olympian synod smil'd;

And, casting far aside th' unfinish'd web

In reverence to Pallas, Beauty's Queen,

Kind cherisher of man's increase, retir'd

To her own Cyprus—from her cestus Love

Bestow'd

*Bestow'd new charms on nature's varying form,
And richly sow'd the well-plough'd waste of life.*

*Such was the carol of the Lesbian bard
On Cytherea, in the loom unskill'd,
Vying with Pallas, patroness of arts.*

I rejoice in being able to enliven and illustrate this philosophical Essay, by so apposite a passage from the very poet, however obscure, from whom Mr. Bryant has struck so much light in his profounder researches. I have given almost a literal translation of the preceding song; and I flatter myself that my candid readers, who are familiar with the decisive style of our antiquarians, will allow me to consider it as a *striking proof*, that a confederacy of very beautiful ancient spinsters was once formed in Greece, who resolutely devoted themselves to the quiet labour of the loom, instead of assisting in the more important business of forming new citizens to support their country. Evident as this point must appear from these remarkable verses, it might puzzle, perhaps, even the very learned gentleman just mentioned, to decide at what period of the Grecian history

history these spinsters lived, and how long they persisted in their dangerous resolution. From the conclusion of the song I am inclined to believe, that they resembled a certain society of modern ladies, under the guidance of a seraphic president, intitled Madonella; a lady whose adventures are related with infinite humour in the first volume of the Tatler, and who, having devoted herself and her associates to a life of virgin purity and retirement, was rapidly and ingeniously induced to take an active part in the necessary increase of the world.

My desire to do all possible honour to the sisterhood, has made me extremely solicitous to discover every Attic Old Maid, whose name might reflect a lustre on the community: but in my historical enquiries for this purpose, I have not been so successful as I expected to be. Many Grecian ladies have been celebrated for an attachment to philosophical studies; and I concluded that, in the list of these, I should find several individuals, who in chastity as well as learning were the faithful votaries
of

of Minerva. Monsieur Menage has compiled, with extensive erudition, a little history of all the female philosophers, of whom any traces can be found in the writings of the ancients. Their number amounts to sixty-five; but it is very remarkable, that if we except St. Catherine, there is only one lady in this long catalogue, who is celebrated for her virginity; and how far that might be either real or meritorious may still be a question, as this lady did not live single, but was the wife of the philosopher Isidorus.

Thus disappointed among the ancient female professors of philosophy, I reflected with singular pleasure, that those more venerable poetical old ladies, the Sibyls, would supply this defect; and of all the Old Maids that antiquity could furnish, I considered them as best entitled to the honourable distinction of being classed at the head of the sisterhood. I imagined their title to this high rank to be fully confirmed by the sentence of St. Jerome; who, speak-

ing of them, in the first part of his eloquent invective against Jovinian, expressly says, that "virginity was their characteristic, "and divination the reward of their virginity *." But, examining the history of these reverend ladies with that attention which it deserves, I soon perceived that the fervent and generous saint had given them credit for a quality, which they were very far from possessing. The learned Servatius Gallæus, who has obliged the world with a thick quarto volume on these interesting females, completely exposes the mistake of St. Jerome, and laughs at him as a ridiculous champion, contending for the chastity of a harlot. Nor can we wonder that the credulity of the candid saint should be treated with derision, since one of the Sibyls, for whose continence he contends, very freely acknowledges, in a remarkable

* Quid referam Sibyllas Erithræam et Cumanam, et octo reliquas, nam Vairo decem fuisse autumat, *Quarum insigne virginitas est, et virginitatis præmium divinatio.* Sanct. Hieron. adversus Jov. p. 185.

verse

verse of her own *, that she had formerly indulged herself in all the criminal excesses of licentious passion.

After all my laborious endeavours to investigate the history of Old Maids in Greece, I must close this chapter upon them, with the modest ignorance of a Grecian philosopher, confessing all I know is that I know nothing: to the virginity of these ancient and perhaps ideal ladies, I may apply the following ingenious simile of a great modern poet :

*Like following life in creatures we dissect,
We lose it in the moment we detect.*

* Μυρία μὲν μοι λεκτρά, γάμος δ' ἕδεις ἐμεληθή.

C H A P. IV.

*On the Vestals, and other Old Maids, of Rome
before the Christian Æra.*

AS the Roman empire was founded on a rape, and no less than six hundred and eighty-three Sabine virgins were forcibly converted into wives, according to the account of that accurate antiquarian Dionysius of Halicarnassus, we cannot expect to meet with many Old Maids in the early periods of the Roman history. Indeed, in the first ages of the republic, the patriotic ambition of the Romans, and the express letter of their law, operated with equal force against a life of celibacy. Cicero, in the opening of his third book, *De Legibus*, has given us the very words of the statute, by which the censors were directed, not only to examine and enroll the children of every Roman family, but to take care
that

that no citizens should lead a single life *; and we learn from a valuable fragment preserved in Aulus Gellius, that the most eminent senators of Rome considered marriage, not as a state of private enjoyment, but as a public indispensable burthen, which every man was bound to support for the good of the community. As the subject is curious and interesting, I shall present to my reader not only the fragment to which I allude, but a considerable passage from the author who has given it a place in his miscellaneous and amusing work.

The sixth chapter, in the first book of Aulus Gellius, begins in the following manner :

“ The oration which Metellus Numidicus, a man of dignity and eloquence, delivered, in his censorship, to exhort the people to matrimony, was read to a large and learned audience. In this oration it was thus written : ‘ If, Romans, we had

* Equitum peditumque prolem describunto : cœlibes esse prohibento.

“ the power of living without a wife, we
“ should all be free from that trouble ; but
“ since nature has so disposed it, that we
“ can neither live very commodiously with
“ them, nor without them exist at all, we
“ must provide rather for perpetual security,
“ than for transient pleasure.’ It appeared
“ to some, that the censor Metellus, whose
“ intention was to exhort the people to
“ marry, ought not to have made such a
“ confession concerning the trouble and
“ perpetual vexations of the married life,
“ since, instead of exhorting, he seemed ra-
“ ther to dissuade and deter. His oration,
“ they said, ought rather to have taken a
“ contrary turn ; he should have asserted,
“ that marriage in general was attended
“ with no vexations ; and if at any time it
“ appeared to produce some, these, he
“ should have said, were light and trifling,
“ very easily endured, and obliterated by a
“ superior portion of emolument and de-
“ light ; nay, that these very vexations
“ were neither common to all, nor owing

“ to the nature of the connection, but oc-
 “ casioned by the failings and injustice of
 “ particular husbands. But Titus Cas-
 “ tricius maintained, that Metellus had
 “ spoken both with truth and propriety.
 “ It is one thing, said he, to speak as a
 “ censor, and another to speak as a rheto-
 “ rician. We allow the latter to use ex-
 “ pressions fraudulent and bold, subtile and
 “ captious, if they have but a certain air of
 “ truth, and the power of exciting, by any
 “ artifice, the passions of the audience.
 “ He observed, moreover, that it is dis-
 “ graceful to a rhetorician, even in a bad
 “ cause, to leave any part of his ground de-
 “ ferted and unfought; but for Metellus,
 “ he said, who spoke to the Roman people
 “ with that sanctity of character, as a man
 “ whose life had been distinguished by ac-
 “ cumulated honours, it became him to
 “ utter nothing but what he himself, and
 “ his whole audience, might esteem strictly
 “ true; and the more so, as he spoke upon
 “ a subject, of which the experience of

“ every day enabled every man to judge.
“ Confessing, therefore, those vexations
“ which were notorious to all men, and de-
“ serving, by that confession, the confi-
“ dence of his auditors, he at last, with
“ ease and rapidity, persuaded them of that
“ important and essential point, that the
“ preservation of the state depended on
“ the prevalence of marriage.”

Without stopping to make any farther remarks on the eloquence of Metellus—from whose honest confession we might infer, that the most spirited of the old Romans were not perfectly able to manage their wives—I shall only observe, that in the first ages of the republic, the censors seem to have attended very minutely to this part of their office, which had so strong a tendency to prevent the existence of Old Maids. Valerius Maximus informs us, that the censors Camillus and Posthumius levied a fine on those citizens who had grown old in a single life, and brought it to the public treasury. Plutarch also, in his
Life

Life of Camillus, relates, that “ as the wars
 “ had made many widows, he obliged such
 “ of the men as lived single, partly by per-
 “ suasion, and partly by threatening them
 “ with fines, to marry those widows.”—
 From the latter circumstance we may infer,
 that virgins of a marriageable age were at
 this period very scarce in Rome; and, in-
 deed, we may believe, that, in the active pa-
 triotic days of the republic, there would not
 have existed a single Roman Old Maid,
 had not the singular religious establishment
 of the vestal virgins formed a kind of nur-
 sery for that respectable sisterhood to whom
 this work is devoted.

As I presume that my fair readers have
 but a slight acquaintance with these most
 interesting nuns of antiquity, although their
 name, surviving that fire for whose eternity
 they prayed, is still applied in poetical lan-
 guage to modern ladies of distinguished
 purity, I shall here insert the curious ac-
 count of the Vestals, which is preserved in
 the above-mentioned most excellent anti-
 quarian,

quarian, Dionysius, and I shall insert it in the words of his accurate and elegant translator, Mr. Spelman.

“ The virgins, who serve the Goddess,
“ were originally four, and elected by the
“ kings, according to the laws established
“ by Numa ; but, afterwards, from the
“ multiplicity of their functions, their
“ number was encreased to six, and has so
“ remained to this day. They live in the
“ temple of the Goddess, into which none
“ are hindered from entering in the day-
“ time ; but it is not lawful for any man to
“ remain there in the night. They are
“ under a necessity of continuing unmarried
“ during the space of thirty years ;
“ which time they employ in offering sacrifices,
“ and performing other rites ordained by the law. During the first
“ ten years, their duty was to learn their
“ functions ; in the second ten, to perform
“ them ; and, during the remainder of their
“ time, to teach others. After the expiration
“ of the term of thirty years, nothing hindered

" dered such as desired it from marrying,
 " upon their quitting their veils *, and the
 " other ensigns of their priesthood ; and
 " some, though very few, have done this,
 " the end of whose lives has not been so
 " very happy as to tempt others to imitate
 " them ; so that the rest, looking upon their
 " calamities as ominous, remain virgins in
 " the temple of the Goddess till their death,
 " and then the pontiffs again chuse another
 " to supply the vacancy. They receive
 " many distinguishing honours from their
 " country, by which the desire of children

* Gellius quotes Antistius Labeo, a man of great learning in the time of Augustus, for many particulars relating to the Vestals ; among the rest, that they could not be admitted under six, nor above ten years of age. I imagine, because it was necessary they should be virgins.—The election was performed in the following manner :—The Pontifex Maximus chose twenty virgins, who, in an assembly of the people, drew lots which of them should succeed the deceased Vestal ; and the virgin upon whom the lot fell was taken by the Pontifex Maximus.

SPELMAN's Note.

" and

“ and of marriage is taken away. They are
“ also subject to great punishment in case
“ of delinquency ; which, by the law, the
“ pontiffs are appointed both to enquire
“ into and punish. Those Vestals who
“ commit lesser crimes, they whip with
“ rods ; but if they suffer themselves to be
“ debauched, they are delivered up by the
“ pontiffs to the most shameful and the
“ most miserable death ; for, while they
“ are yet alive, they are carried upon a
“ bier, with all the formality of a funeral,
“ their friends and relations attending
“ them with lamentations ; being arrived
“ at the gate Collina, they are placed in a
“ subterraneous cell, prepared within the
“ walls, in their funeral attire, without any
“ sepulchral column, funeral rites, or other
“ customary solemnities. There seem to
“ be many indications of the priestesses who
“ does not perform the holy functions
“ with purity ; but the principal is the ex-
“ tinction of the fire, which the Romans
“ dread above all misfortunes, looking
“ upon

“ upon it, from whatever cause it proceeds,
 “ as an omen that portends the destruction
 “ of their city; and they bring fire again
 “ into the temple, with many expiatory
 “ rites.—It is also well worth relating, in
 “ what manner this Goddess has manifested
 “ herself in favour of those virgins who
 “ have been falsely accused.—It is said, that
 “ once the fire being extinguished, through
 “ some carelessness of Æmilia, who had
 “ then the care of it, and had intrusted it
 “ to another virgin, who was newly chosen
 “ into their number, and then learning her
 “ duty, the whole city was in great disorder,
 “ and an enquiry made by the pontiffs,
 “ whether some defilement of the priestesses
 “ might not have occasioned the extinction of the fire. Upon this they
 “ say, that Æmilia, who was innocent,
 “ but distracted at what had happened,
 “ stretched out her hands to the altar, and,
 “ in the presence of the priests and the rest
 “ of the virgins, said, ‘ O Vesta, tutelary
 “ Goddess of this city, if, during the space
 “ of

“ of near thirty years, I have performed
“ the holy functions to thee with holiness
“ and justice, and have preserved a pure
“ mind and a chaste body, appear in my
“ defence, and assist me, and do not suffer
“ your priestesses to die the most miserable of
“ all deaths ; but if I have been guilty of
“ any impiety, let my punishment expiate
“ the guilt of the city.’—Having said this,
“ she tore off a piece of the linen garment
“ she had on, and threw it upon the altar.
“ After this prayer, they say, that from the
“ ashes, which had been long cold, and
“ retained no spark of fire, a great flame
“ shone forth through the linen ; so that the
“ city did not stand in need, either of expi-
“ ations or of a new fire.—But what I am
“ going to relate is still more wonderful,
“ and more like a fable.—They say, that
“ somebody having falsely accused one of
“ the virgins, whose name was Tucia, and,
“ being unable to object to her the extinc-
“ tion of the fire, he supported his accusa-
“ tion by false inductions drawn from
“ probable

" probable conjectures and testimonies ;
 " and that the virgin, being ordered to
 " make her defence, said only this—that she
 " would clear herself from the accusation
 " by her actions ; and, having said this,
 " and called upon the Goddesses to be her
 " guide, she proceeded to the Tiber, the
 " pontiffs consenting, and all the citizens
 " attending her : when she came to the
 " river, she was so hardy as to under-
 " take a thing, which, of all others, is
 " looked upon as impossible, even to a
 " proverb ; and, having taken water out of
 " the river in an empty sieve, and carried
 " it as far as the Forum, she poured it out
 " at the feet of the pontiffs ; after which,
 " they say, her accuser, though great en-
 " quiry was made after him, could never
 " be found, either alive or dead *."

If some of these calumniated Vestals
 were thus marvellously preserved, others
 seem to have been destroyed with the most

* Spelman's Dionysius, vol. i. p. 345.

savage barbarity, in spite of favourable occurrences that might have been humanely construed into a supernatural assertion of their innocence. In the rhetorical fragments of Seneca, a fair delinquent is mentioned, who, being convicted of impurity, was brought to suffer death, by being thrown from the summit of so high a rock, that it was terrific even to those who looked down from it in a state of security *. In the moment preceding her punishment, she appealed to Vesta in vindication of her purity; and, being flung from the precipice, descended without injury to the ground; when a set of inhuman orators maintained, that she ought to be brought back, and thrown a second time from the rock, alledging, that her wonderful escape rather indicated the anger than the protection of the Gods, since it was their design, not to save the life of this convicted criminal, but

* *Erat altitudo montis etiam securè despicientibus horrenda.*

to lengthen her punishment. Seneca does not inform us, that she perished in consequence of this cruel argument; and, indeed, I am tempted to hope, for the honour of human nature, that the whole story was nothing more than the fiction of a fanciful declaimer.

However this may be, the anecdote affords us a striking proof of the extreme severity with which the Romans regarded the frailty of a Vestal. Indeed, the same author furnishes us with a proof of this point yet more extraordinary; for he gives us part of a criminal oration against a Vestal, who was accused of incest, not for any evident act of incontinence, but merely for having written a verse, which forcibly expressed her sense of those pleasures, which the married fair ones enjoy. This curious morsel of heart-inspired poetry is happily preserved, and I must gratify my female reader with a translation of it, though I may injure the spirit of this feeling poetess.

by converting her single *Latin* verse into the following *English* couplet :

*Happy the nymphs who gain the nuptial bed!
O let me die, if 'tis not sweet to wed * !*

We find, in the austere rhetorician, the most bitter invective against these natural sentiments of a tender female. "How expressive," cries the declaimer, "is her language ! how apparently flowing from the inmost soul, not only of an experienced, but of an enraptured woman !—She is guilty of incest, though not actually violated, who wishes for violation †."

Let me add, however, in justice to Seneca, that he gives us also the opposite side of the question. "We confess," replies the defender of this poetical virgin, "we confess to you, she is guilty of one crime : she is

* *Felices nuptæ ! moriar nisi nubere dulce est.*

† *Quam expressa vox, quam ex imis visceribus emissa, non expertæ tantum, sed delectatæ. Incesta est etiam sine stupro, quæ cupit stuprum.*

possessed

possessed of genius : how then could she fail to envy Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, or that happy parent who gave birth to Cato*?"—We are not told what was the fate of this ingenious Vestal ; and she also, like her sister, who is mentioned in the preceding anecdote of the rock, might be a mere creature of fancy, and her offence invented for the exercise of declamation.

If our humanity is gratified by this supposition, yet other ancient writers afford us a melancholy assurance, that several unhappy Vestals actually suffered the savage fate of being buried alive. For my own part, when I read of such events, I feel that all the splendor of Roman glory is entirely eclipsed by these infernal acts of barbarous superstition. Let me remark, however, for the credit of the republic, that this punishment was introduced by the elder Tarquin.

* Unum crimen vobis confiteor : ingenium habet. Quidni invideat Corneliæ, matri Gracchorum ? Quidni illi quæ Catonem peperit ?

It was first inflicted in his reign, upon a hapless victim, whose name was Pinaria. I shall not enumerate all the unfortunate females, who shared this inhuman destiny, but content myself with observing, that, according to the calculation of the Abbé Nadal (who has given a copious history of the Vestals, in the Memoirs of the French Academy) from the establishment of these virgins under Numa, to their suppression in the reign of Theodosius, a period of about a thousand years, we cannot assign more to each century than a single victim. As to the number of honest and unsuspected Old Maids, which this religious society might produce in the same space of time, this is a point requiring so much nice calculation, that I shall leave it to be settled by our own indefatigable antiquarians.

We may fairly suppose, that, in spite of those unpromising omens, by which many of the elder Vestals were deterred from wedlock, according to the above-mentioned account of Dionysius, some of these superannuated

nuated priestesses were eager to assert their privilege, and ventured to marry. Indeed we have a singular proof that this sometimes happened, in a few remarkable verses of the Christian poet Prudentius, who has exhibited a picture of the Vestals, which is certainly painted with more zeal than politeness. As the passage is curious, and has not been fully quoted by the modern historian of these interesting ladies, I shall endeavour to amuse my fair readers by a poetical translation of it.

*Now let me search into the Vestal's fame!
To modesty's bright crown what seals her
claim?*

*The little slaves in childhood are immur'd,
Before the judgment of the mind matur'd
Can grow of virgin fame devoutly fond,
And spurn the weight of the connubial bond.
On joyless altars, which her heart must hate,
The captive virgin is condemn'd to wait;
Not scorning pleasure, but from blifs confin'd,
Untouch'd her body, not untouch'd her mind:*

*Restless the bed, on which unlov'd she lies,
And for the loss of bridal rapture sighs:
Hope fans this fire: for her the torch may flare,
And nuptial fillets bind her hoary hair;
Since, when thro' stated years her vows are
paid,*

*Vesta rejects the antiquated maid:
While fit for nuptial joys, no nuptial kiss
Enrich'd her bosom with a mother's bliss;
A veteran Vestal, now her priesthood ends,
She quits the altar, on which youth attends,
To Hymen's rites, a wrinkled bride! she's
led,*

And learns to wanton in an icy bed.*

Though

* *Quæ nunc vestalis sit virginitttis honestas
Discutiam, qua lege regat decus omne pudoris.
Ac primum parvæ teneris capiuntur in annis,
Antè voluntatis propriæ quam libera secta,
Laude pudicitie fervens et amore decorum,
Justa maritandi condemnet vincula sexus.*

*Captivus pudor ingratis addicitur aris;
Nec contempta perit miseris, sed adempta voluptas
Corporis intacti; non mens intacta tenetur.*

Nec requies datur ulla toris, quibus innuba cæcum

Vulnus,

Though the picture, which this pious poet has given us, may be considered as a piece of coarse painting, it was undoubtedly drawn from the life. In one point I fear he judged but too well; I mean, in the general unhappiness which he attributes to the younger Vestals. From the time and mode of their introduction into this religious servitude, we cannot suppose that they felt themselves very easy under it, when they grew old enough to acquire a knowledge of social life, and to experience the full force

*Vulnus, et amissas suspirat fœmina tædas.
Tum quia non totum spes salva interficit ignem :
Nam resides quandoque faces adolere licebit,
Festaque decrepitis obtendere flammea canis.
Tempore præscripto membra intemerata requirens,
Tandem virgineam fastidit Vesta senectam.
Dum thalamis habilis tumuit vigor, irrita nullus
Fœcundavit amor materno viscera partu.
Nubit anus veterana, sacro perfuncta labore,
Desertisque focis, quibus est famulata juventus,
Transfert emeritas ad fulcra jugalia rugas,
Discit et in gelido nova nupta tepescere lecto.*

Prudentius in Symmachum, ver. 583.

of all the natural passions. The Romans seem to have been sensible of the many mortifications, which must have attended the life of these lovely captives : and they endeavoured to compensate the evils of their condition, by frequently increasing the various honours that were paid to every individual of this holy order. Even the cold-blooded Augustus bestowed upon them some marks of his favour ; and, as the historian Dion Cassius asserts, admitted these sequestered virgins to the enjoyment of all those civic rights, which the policy of Rome had confined to mothers. Among the many privileges that belonged to the Vestal, there was one that must have been peculiarly delightful to a feeling heart ; I mean the privilege of saving the condemned. The Romans attached such an idea of sanctity to the person of a Vestal, that if a criminal, in his way to execution, was fortunate enough to meet one of these virgins, the bare sight of so pure a personage was sufficient to expiate his offences, and the happy incident immediately

diately restored him to life and liberty. On these occasions, however, it was necessary for the priestesses to affirm, that such meeting was the mere effect of chance. Yet in the most turbulent and sanguinary days of the republic, the lives of some political delinquents have been saved by the supplication of the Vestals. The vindictive Sylla himself is said to have granted the life of Cæsar to the intercession of these compassionate virgins, highly provoked as he was by the resistance of that spirited and ambitious youth. Perhaps the extreme eagerness, which Cæsar afterwards shewed to obtain the office of supreme pontiff, was partly owing to his generous desire of displaying his gratitude to these holy virgins, to whose tenderness he was indebted for his life: for it was the duty of the supreme pontiff to superintend this female society; to retire into a place of privacy with every young Vestal, who had committed any trivial offence, and, having stripped the fair delinquent, to scourge her in proportion to her demerit.

demerit. It was perhaps in this high office that the celebrated humanity of this merciful tyrant was most uniformly exerted; and, however the Roman empire might justly murmur at his usurped authority, when we consider the characteristics of this great man, we may reasonably conclude, that no tender Vestal ever thought herself much aggrieved by falling under the rod of Cæsar. It had indeed been happy for this tender sisterhood, if the succeeding emperors had superintended them with that gentle spirit, which on such occasions displayed itself in this the most liberal and most accomplished of tyrants. But among the many monsters, who succeeded this extraordinary usurper in the government of the Roman world, there were some, who appear to have delighted in the horrible enormity of burying even an innocent Vestal alive. The younger Pliny has related a transaction of this kind, in which the spirit of the lovely victim appears in so interesting a light, that I shall insert the story in the words of Mr. Melmoth,

moth, that amiable translator, whose delicacy of sentiment, and elegance of language, have placed him on a level with his engaging original.

“ Domitian’s vengeance generally raged
 “ with the greatest fury, where his evidence
 “ failed him most. That emperor had de-
 “ termined, that Cornelia Maximilla, one
 “ of the Vestal virgins, should be buried
 “ alive, from an extravagant notion, that
 “ those kind of exemplary severities did
 “ honour to his reign. Accordingly, in
 “ the character of high-priest, or rather in-
 “ deed in that of a lawless and cruel tyrant,
 “ he convened the sacred college, not in the
 “ pontifical court where they usually as-
 “ semble, but at his villa near Alba; and
 “ there (by a sentence no less wicked, as it
 “ was passed when she was not present to de-
 “ fend herself, than as it was the effect of pas-
 “ sion and revenge) he condemned her of
 “ having violated her Vestal vow. Yet he
 “ himself had been guilty, not only of de-
 “ bauching his brother’s daughter, but was
 “ also

“ also necessary to her death : for that lady
“ being a widow, in order to conceal her
“ shame, endeavoured to procure an abor-
“ tion, and by that means lost her life.
“ However, the priests were directed to see
“ the sentence immediately performed upon
“ Cornelia. As they were leading her to
“ the place of execution, she called upon
“ Vesta, and the rest of the Gods, to attest
“ her virtue ; and, amongst other exclama-
“ tions, frequently cried out, *Is it possible*
“ *that Cæsar can think me polluted, under the*
“ *influence of whose sacred functions he has*
“ *conquered and triumphed ?* Whether she
“ said this in flattery or derision ; whether
“ it proceeded from a consciousness of her
“ innocence, or contempt of the emperor,
“ is not certain* ; but she continued ex-
“ claiming in this manner, till she came to
“ the place of execution ; to which she
“ was led at least like a criminal, though
“ perhaps not really one. As she was go-

* It was usual with Domitian to triumph, not only without a victory, but even after a defeat.

“ing down into the subterraneous cavern,
 “her gown hung upon something in the way,
 “upon which, turning back to disengage
 “it, the executioner offered her his hand,
 “which she refused with some horror, as
 “if she could not touch it without impurity.
 “Thus she preserved the appearance of
 “a consummate chastity to the concluding
 “scene of her life;

“*And her last care was decently to fall**.”

“Celer, likewise, a Roman knight, who
 “was accused of being her gallant, during
 “the whole time his sentence was executing
 “upon him, in the square near the senate-
 “house, persisted in saying, *What crime*
 “*have I been guilty of? I have been guilty of*
 “*none*†.”

If the personal security of these unhappy
 virgins was thus wantonly invaded by the

* Euripides, in his Tragedy of Hecuba.

† Melmoth's Pliny: the eleventh Letter of the
 fourth Book.

barbarity of the Pagan emperors, the chaste reputation of the sisterhood has been treated with equal cruelty and injustice by the outrageous zeal of some Christian authors. We have already seen with what indelicate contempt the pious poet Prudentius has spoken of Vestal purity. Saint Ambrose, in his Treatise on Virgins, proceeds still farther against it. Having asserted that virginity was only affected among the Gentiles, the good saint exclaims, “ Who will
“ urge against me, the virgins of Vesta, or
“ the priestesses of Pallas? What kind of
“ purity is that, which depends not upon
“ morals, but upon age? which, instead of
“ being perpetual, has a stated period prescribed?—There is greater wantonness in
“ that virtue, whose fall is assigned to the
“ latter season of life: they who allow a final period to virginity, teach their own
“ virgins that they are released from the
“ duty, and destitute of the power, of perseverance. But what kind of a religion
“ is that, in which young maidens are
“ commanded

“ commanded to be chaste, and old women
 “ wanton * ? ”

My concern for the credit of many an honest, though unknown Vestal Old Maid, obliges me to observe, that the holy Ambrose has given a very unfair and a very ungenerous representation of this chaste community; but, severe as he is towards them, his severity may be considered as moderation, when compared with the merciless treatment they have received from his brother saint, the vehement saint Jerome: that eloquent and impetuous father of the Catholic church seems to lay his daring axe to the very roots, not only of

* *Quis mihi prædicit Vestæ virgines et Palladis sacerdotes? Qualis ista est non morum pudicitia, sed annorum, quæ non perpetuitate sed ætate præscribitur? Petulantior est talis integritas, cujus corruptela seniori servatur ætati. Ipsi docent, virgines suas non debere perseverare, nec posse, qui virginitati finem dederunt. Qualis autem est illa religio, ubi pudicæ adolescentes jubentur esse, impudicæ anus.*

Divi Ambrosii de Virginibus, lib. i.

Pagan,

Pagan, but of all heretical virginity; expressly saying, that the virgins, such as are called so among divers heretics, and particularly the Manichæan, are to be considered as harlots, and not as virgins*.

Let me add, however, as an instance of candour in this zealous saint, that although he appears so bitter an enemy to all unorthodox virgins, in the preceding passage from his letter to Eustochium, the daughter of his friend Paula, on the preservation of virginity—yet, in his invective against Jovinian, who had questioned the extraordinary merit of the most perfect chastity, he launches forth into a spirited panegyric on the virgins of the heathen world, allowing that title not only to the Sibyls, but to Cassandra herself, though this unfortunate heroine had been very grossly injured, both

* *Cæterum virgines, quales apud diversas hæreses, et quales apud impurissimum Manichæum, esse dicuntur, scorta sunt existimandæ, non virgines.*

*Sanct. Hieron. Epist. ad Eustochium
de Custodia Virginitatis.*

by a Divinity and a mortal, being deluded by Apollo, and ravished by Ajax.

I shall not stop to comment on this inconsistency in the rapid and energetic St. Jerome, as I intend, in the subsequent part of my work, to speak more at large, not only of this celebrated advocate for a single life, but of many other saints, whose pious labours have been particularly directed to that most attractive subject, virginity.

It is not surprising, that some of these holy writers should, in the heat of their zeal, make very free with the reputation both of the young and old maids among the Pagans. We may forgive the excesses of mistaken piety; but when a critic of modern times—when an author, writing in a country that piques itself on delicacy and politeness—when a Frenchman, in the courteous age of Lewis the Fourteenth, rashly attempts to dishonour all the virgins of the heathen world, I esteem it my duty, as the voluntary champion of the insulted sisterhood, to expose and chastise this very arro-

gant and licentious delinquent. The person who has been guilty of this high misdemeanor, is Monsieur Morin; who, in the year 1713, produced, in the French Academy of Belles Lettres, a composition entitled, "A critical History of Celibacy." In the close of it, this presumptuous author not only traduces the poor mortal virgins of antiquity, but attempts to dishonour even the virgin Goddesses themselves.

That the sisterhood may be judges of his offence against them, I shall translate some passages of the treatise, in which their purity is so grievously insulted. I shall begin with the instances he produces, of that high esteem for chastity, which the heathens professed.

" Virginité passée amongst them for
 " something divine and sacred. The
 " Greeks called those who professed it
 " *ἡμίθεοι*, *Demigods*, or equal to Gods; and
 " the Latin etymologists derive the word
 " *cælebs* from *cælum*—*cælebs* quasi *cœlestis*—implying, that those who live in ce-
 " libacy

“ libacy are celestial beings. They re-
 “ garded this virtue as a supernatural
 “ grace,

“ *Et plusquam fœminâ virgo !*

“ *Virgin ! a title higher far than wife !*

“ They believed, that the Gods granted it
 “ only as a special favour ; How can we
 “ otherwise explain the fervent supplication
 “ of Daphne, when she saw herself on the
 “ point of losing her virginity ?

“ *Da mihi perpetua, genitor charissime, dixit,*
 “ *Virginitate frui ! dedit hoc pater ante Dianæ.*

“ *Grant me, dear Sire, a virgin to remain !—*
 “ *This Dian ask'd of Jove, nor ask'd in vain.*

“ What are we to understand by the me-
 “ tamorphosis of this maiden into a laurel,
 “ if not this, that chastity was considered
 “ by the heathens as a sure passport to im-
 “ mortality, of which the laurel was the
 “ symbol ? This is the opinion of our
 “ mythologists. If it happened, that this

“ treasure was at any time lost by surprise
 “ or violence, what trouble ! what confu-
 “ sion ! what despair !—‘ My dear virgi-
 “ nity !’ said the famous female of Greece,
 “ ‘ my dear virginity ! what is become of
 “ thee ?’—The Roman ladies did not esteem
 “ it less. Can there be any thing more
 “ touching than the remorse of Europa, in
 “ Horace, after her adventure with Jupiter ?

“ ————*Pater, O relictum*

“ *Filiæ nomen !* ————

“ ‘ My dear father, what wilt thou say ?
 “ what wilt thou think of me, when thou
 “ art informed, that I have had the weak-
 “ ness to abandon the honour of a maiden ?
 “ when thou art informed, that those noble
 “ principles of religion and piety, which
 “ thou hast taken such pains to inspire
 “ me with, have all yielded to a frantic
 “ passion ?’

“ ————*pietasque, dixit,*

“ *Victa furore.*

“ ‘ What

“ ‘What a difference, great Gods! between
 “ the condition in which I was, and that to
 “ which I see myself reduced!’

“ *Unde, quo veni!*

“ ‘No,’ adds she, ‘a single death is not suffi-
 “ cient; it requires more; it requires an
 “ eternal perdition to expiate the offence
 “ of a maiden, who suffers herself to be
 “ seduced.’

“ ———— *levis una mors est*

“ *Virginum culpæ.* ————

“ Can any thing be said, can any thing
 “ be conceived, more forcible, in the pre-
 “ sent times?—They swore by their virgi-
 “ nity as by something particularly sacred:

“ *Vera cano, sic usque sacras innoxia lauras*
 “ *Vescar, et æternum sit mihi virginitas.*

“ *Truths I announce, so be my laurels pure!*
 “ *So, without end, my virgin wealth endure!*

“ Such is the adjuration of a Sibyl, in ‘Ti-
 “ bullus.—It was a universal principle of

“ Paganism, that the Gods were pleased
 “ with chastity :

“ *Casta placent Superis.*

“ Their sacrifices were not thought com-
 “ plet, without the assistance of a virgin.
 “ They might, indeed, begin them with-
 “ out this necessary minister, or make the
 “ libation (*libare*) ; but they could not
 “ complete the ceremony, which was ex-
 “ pressed by the Latin word *litare*. They
 “ were persuaded, that this virtue is what
 “ advances us nearest to Divinity.

“ They said, that as God is alone suffi-
 “ cient to himself, and finds in his own
 “ essence all that is necessary to him for
 “ sovereign beatitude, so also virgins, in-
 “ stead of foolishly seeking their happiness
 “ in the possession of other creatures, find
 “ it without wandering from themselves, in
 “ their purity, in their innocence, in their
 “ integrity *.

“ They all maintained, that, if the Divi-

* Plotinus, lib. v. cap. i.

" nity was at any time pleased to communi-
 " cate itself to human nature, this neither
 " could, nor ought to be, with any other
 " than a virgin: Decet enim naturam in-
 " tactam, impollutam, puram, et vere vir-
 " ginem, cum Deo conversari *. It is true,
 " these are not the expressions of a Pagan,
 " but of Philo the Jew, which is not less
 " worthy of observation.—Macrobius says
 " almost the same thing, in terms very si-
 " milar: Nulli aptius jungitur *novas* in-
 " corrupta quam virgini †. The incor-
 " ruptible unity of God cannot unite with
 " any creature more suited to itself than
 " a virgin.—Let us hear a Platonician ‡
 " unfold

* Philo. † Macrobius in Somnio Scipionis.

‡ Naumachius.—The French authors are very apt to quote the ancients in such a manner as to perplex, instead of informing, their readers. Mr. Morin had only annexed the name Naumachius to this singular translation from a Greek author, whom he calls a Platonician. I was for some time unable to discover this obscure advocate of virginity; but at length have found, that he is one of the many poets but little known,

“ unfold the sentiments of his sect on this
 “ system of life :—‘ It reflects honour on

known, whose fragments are preserved in the collection of Stobæus. The best critics are of opinion, says the intelligent Fabricius, that Naumachius was a Christian. Indeed, this appears highly probable from the passage in question ; which I shall here insert, with a poetical version of it, to do all the justice in my power to this neglected encomiast of Old Maids,

Καλον μιν δεμας αγνον εχειν, αδημητα τε μιμνειν
 Παρθενικην καθαροισι τ' αιει μελεδημασι χαιρειν,
 Μητε βαρυτλητων λαγονων περι φορτον αγεσαν,
 Μητε πονον τρομερσαν αγαστονον ειλειθυιης,
 Αλλ' ησθαι βασιλειαν αφαιρων θηλυτερων
 Ψυχης ομμα φαεινον υπερ βιοτοιο χερσαν
 Ειθα γαμοι κεδνοι και αληθεες ειθα μιγεισα
 Θισπεσιος επεεσσι νοηματα φαεα τιχτει.

Stobæus, p. 420. edit. 1609.

*'Tis lovely, as a spotless maid to live,
 Blest in that joy which pure ideas give,
 Free from that load the pregnant form sustains,
 Nor trembling at Lucina's fearful pains ;
 But o'er frail females rais'd in triumph high,
 Darting o'er life the mind's unclouded eye :
 True wedlock thus in heavenly terms is taught,
 And the rapt virgin teems with radiant thought.*

“ a maiden

" a maiden to preserve with solicitude the
 " purity of her body and of her soul.
 " This condition gives her a great supe-
 " riority over all persons of her own sex.
 " Disengaged from the cares of the world,
 " she has the eyes of her mind continually
 " fixed upon a spiritual life, from whence
 " she derives all the delights of true
 " wedlock, in filling her heart with such
 " divine words, as enable her to conceive
 " and to produce the most luminous me-
 " ditations.'

" Here, indeed, we have magnificent
 " language, sublime ideas, and specula-
 " tions of singular beauty ; but unluckily,
 " when compared with practice and reality,
 " we shall find them empty words, and no-
 " thing more. These fine declaimers were
 " not destitute of light ; but, as they knew
 " God, and did not honour him as God, we
 " may also say, that if they perceived the
 " excellence of virgin purity, they suc-
 " ceeded no better in the observation of
 " its laws. Whoever is disposed to search
 " into

“ into the secret history of such persons
“ among them, as lived in celibacy, and
“ affected the most scrupulous continence,
“ may discover, if not gross debauchery, at
“ least many absurdities, and an absolute
“ farce. To begin with their Goddeffes:
“ —Vesta, the most ancient of all, was she
“ not represented in her temple with an in-
“ fant in her arms? Whence had she taken
“ it?—Minerva had her Erichthonius, who
“ was almost continually at her side. Her
“ adventure with Vulcan is well known,
“ and enables us to declare, that if she
“ could on any ground pretend to the cha-
“ racter of a virgin, she certainly had no
“ claim to the title of *Untouched*, her com-
“ mon appellation. She had even some
“ temples consecrated to her honour in the
“ character of a mother.—Diana had also
“ her gallant Virbius, or Hippolytus, and,
“ still worse, her Endymion. The only
“ pleasure she took, in indulging her eyes
“ with the contemplation of his sleeping
“ form, tells us enough, and, indeed, too
“ much

“ much for a virgin.—The Muses, in their
 “ time, passed for very liberal coquettes.
 “ Myrtilus, who is quoted by Arnobius,
 “ boldly affirmed, that they were the in-
 “ dulent intimates of a certain Megaleon,
 “ who had a taste for music and poetry :
 “ he even assigns children to all of them,
 “ and mentions all their several names.
 “ —Their Vestals, whose chastity they so
 “ highly extolled, were only obliged to re-
 “ main single to the age of thirty, when
 “ they were restored to all their natural
 “ rights : they did not fail to exercise these
 “ rights before that period ; and we must
 “ not believe that the Romans buried
 “ alive all the Vestals, who indulged them-
 “ selves in that liberty ; no, only those in-
 “ discreet virgins, who had not learned the
 “ secret art of conducting themselves ac-
 “ cording to that useful maxim, *Si non*
 “ *caste, saltem caute*—if not with chastity,
 “ at least with caution *.”

* *Memoires de l'Academie, &c. tome quatrieme,*
 p. 308.

Such

Such are the unwarrantable liberties which Monsieur Morin has taken with Pagan virginity.—In answer to the attack which this petulant Frenchman has made on all the Old Maids of antiquity, both mortal and divine, I shall only observe, that the inference he draws from the Pagan sentiments he produces, is diametrically opposite to what it ought to be, not only according to the rules of delicacy and candour, but according to the laws of sound reasoning. Having shewn us very copiously, and very fairly, that the heathen ladies set the highest value on virginity, he ought undoubtedly to have said, that although the personal history of some ancient nymphs and goddeffes might induce us to believe that incontinence was prevalent in the days of Heathenism, yet, when we consider the forcible and graceful terms, in which some of these frail nymphs lament their own weakness, we ought certainly to conclude, that many honest virgins, though their names have not reached us, existed in
the

the Pagan world, and maintained, in the midst of its tempting licentiousness, a very happy and honourable agreement between their principles and their practice.

Some of the Pagan Goddesses should undoubtedly have been excepted from this general censure; three in particular, whose virginity (though it will not, I fear, reflect much honour on the sisterhood) was so unquestionable as to become a kind of proverb; I mean the Furies, whose maiden purity is asserted in a striking fragment of Sophocles*.

It may perhaps extenuate the offence of Monsieur Morin against the sisterhood, to remark, that he was led into this wanton cruelty towards the virgins of Paganism, by his desire of paying an oblique compliment to those more numerous Old Maids, the Roman Catholic Nuns; of whom I shall speak at large in the subsequent part of this

* *Αἱ παρθενοὶ Ἐρινυες.*

Sophocles apud Suidam.

work. At present, I have a few more observations to make on the ladies of ancient Rome.—These ladies may be said, like the heroes of their country, to have reached the extremes both of virtue and of vice. There are two anecdotes in the Roman History, which particularly discover the variation of female manners: the first is beautifully recorded by Livy, in a few words; which must lose, I fear, a great part of their graceful energy by the following translation.

“ The Patrician matrons had expelled
“ from their religious assembly Virginia,
“ the daughter of Aulus, for violating the
“ dignity of their order by her marriage
“ with Volumnius, the Plebeian consul. A
“ short altercation, arising from female
“ resentment, blazed forth in a general
“ contest of indignant spirits; when
“ Virginia justly boasted, that she had entered
“ the temple of Patrician Modesty, in
“ the character of a modest Patrician, the
“ wife only of one man, to whom she
“ was led a virgin; and that she could

“ neither repent of that husband, nor
 “ of his honours and exploits. She en-
 “ hanced, by a very noble deed, the magna-
 “ nimity of her speech:—she set apart a
 “ sufficient space in the house where she
 “ resided for a moderate sanctuary; she
 “ placed in it an altar; and, having assem-
 “ bled the Plebeian matrons, and lamented
 “ to them the injustice of the Patricians;
 “ ‘ This altar,’ she said, ‘ I dedicate to Ple-
 “ beian Modesty; and I exhort you, that, as
 “ there exists among the men of this city
 “ a rivalry in valour, there may be such
 “ also in modesty among its matrons. Let
 “ it be your endeavour, that this altar may
 “ be, if possible, more sanctified than theirs,
 “ and acquire the reputation of being at-
 “ tended by chaster votaries!’ ”

To this pleasing picture of spirited mo-
 desty, we find a striking and melancholy
 contrast in the conduct of those Roman la-
 dies, who, in the consulship of Acilius Bal-
 bus and Porcius Cato, were so extrava-
 gantly licentious, that the senate thought
 proper

proper to consult the Sibylline oracle for some method of averting the public evils, arising from female depravity: they were directed to supplicate the Divinity who presided over the tender affections; and accordingly built a new temple to Venus, under the title of Verticordia—The Corrector of the Heart.

This extraordinary fact is related by Valerius Maximus, and clearly alluded to in the following verses of Ovid.

* *Propitiate Venus!—on that heavenly friend
Your charms, your manners, and your fame
depend:*

*In Rome of old weak Chastity decay'd:
Our fires consulted the Cumæan Maid:*

* *Supplicibus verbis illam placate: sub illa
Et forma et mores et bona fama manent.*

Româ pudicitia proavörum tempore lapsa est:

Cumæam, veteres, consulistis anum;

Templa jubet Veneri fieri: quibus ordine factis,

Inde Venus verso nomina corde tenet.

Ovid Fast. Lib. iv. v. 154

She

*She cried—To Venus a new temple frame!
Hence the kind Goddess holds her moral name.*

Ovid seems to have been as partial to the fair sex as any individual of the poetical choir; yet we cannot say that his poetry, taken altogether, leads us to think very highly of Roman chastity, in the celebrated age of Augustus. If the state of manners could be fairly estimated from the suspicious testimony of a satirical poet, we might suppose the condition of this tender virtue still more deplorable in the succeeding reigns; and we might absolutely despair of finding a single Roman Old Maid after the days of Juvenal. This outrageous declaimer, in that most gross and virulent libel against the fair sex, his sixth Satire, considers the man as perfectly insane, who expects to meet with a chaste woman in Rome. But such indelicate sarcasms are disgraceful only to their author; and I doubt not but many good wives, and virgins (for such surely existed, even in the days of Juvenal) despised

the gross invective of this frantic moralist, as much as those of modern times have despised the less indecent sarcasm of Pope, that

“ Every woman is at heart a rake.”

It is very remarkable, that the three satirists, who have written against the lovely part of the creation with the most acrimonious hostility, were three old bachelors: at least we have never heard that Juvenal had a wife; and of Boileau and Pope we know, not only that they were never married, but in all probability never flattered by the endearments of any amiable woman. I have made this remark, because it will naturally lead me to what reflects the highest honour on the sisterhood—a comparison between old bachelors and Old Maids in an important point, which very forcibly expresses the different characters of each community.

We find that these three poetical and moral old bachelors, in those raging fits
of

of four spleen, which they falsely supposed the enthusiasm of genuine virtue, calumniated woman, though a gentle being, from whom they had received no injury, and with whom they could never form a perfect acquaintance. Now observe the contrast; among all the Old Maids who have written either verse or prose—and their number is infinite—I never heard of one, who had vented her ill-humour in such bitter and contemptuous invectives against the stronger and more injurious sex. No; the ancient virgin has that natural tenderness and generosity of heart, that, whatever her ignorance of man may be, whatever ground she may have to complain of his neglect, she still considers him, to use the words of Shakespeare, as the paragon of animals. The excess of virtue has been known, in many male moralists, to degenerate into a fullen and preposterous contempt and hatred towards the whole human race; but, for the honour of the fair sex in general, and of my candid friends the Old Maids in particular, I beg it may be for ever remem-

bered, that they are perfectly free from that most disgusting and most wretched of all mental infirmities, misanthropy.

But to return to the main subject of my present chapter, the Old Maids of ancient Rome.—I cannot indeed exhibit such a list of these ladies as I could wish; but the deficiency, without doubt, arises not from the rarity of the character, but from the inexcusable inaccuracy, which I have before lamented in the ancient historians and biographers, who have failed to commemorate the merits of the sisterhood. I am happy, however, in being able to conclude, and to embellish this chapter with the name of one illustrious Old Maid, who may be regarded as a peculiar favourite of Minerva, since she was not only eminent for her chastity, but excelled in one of the most elegant among the arts. I mean the celebrated Lala, who, though not a native of Rome, exercised the profession of painting in that city, during the youth of Marcus Varro. He probably gave a full description of this amiable person,

person, in one of those 490 volumes, which he is said to have written. Though the works of this most learned Roman have unfortunately perished, the name and merits of Lala have happily survived. We are told, that she painted with great rapidity ; that she excelled in the portraits of women ; and that her pictures bore a price superior to what was given to the most skilful painters of her time. Her claim to honourable distinction in this volume, is grounded on the unquestionable evidence of that profound naturalist, antiquarian, and connoisseur, the elder Pliny ; who certainly could not be deceived in such a point of natural history ; and who asserts, in the most positive language, that Lala was a perpetual virgin.

With this lady I must close my very imperfect account of the Pagan virgins ; and, when I reflect how many good but unknown Old Maids existed before the chaste Lala, I cannot help breathing a sigh of regret, similar to that which Horace expresses

in reflecting on the many brave, but unequalled warriors who lived before Agamemnon ;

*Chaste was their fame, yet now in darkness
drown'd,*

Their hapless virtue no kind herald found.

But let us hasten to console ourselves with a view of the more fortunate ancient virgins of the Christian sisterhood ; these, instead of wanting an encomiast, have perhaps been sometimes extolled in too lavish panegyrics ; as this, however, is a question of great delicacy, we will proceed to a candid and ample discussion of it, in our subsequent chapters.—I shall begin with considering the infinite increase of Old Maids after the establishment of the Christian æra.

END OF THE THIRD PART.

P A R T

PART IV.

ON OLD MAIDS, AFTER THE
CHRISTIAN ÆRA.

CHAP. I.

*On the infinite Increase of Old Maids after
the Christian Æra.*

I Am now arrived at the most hazardous part of this important Essay; and I feel that the future conduct of it must be attended with many difficulties. To do full justice to my Maiden subject, I hold it necessary to dwell on several of those ancient fathers of the church, who considered virginity as the darling object of their pious lucubrations: but, as I wish to render these volumes attractive to every class of readers, let me here declare, that I shall zealously

endeavour to speak of all the saints, who have touched on this interesting topic before me, in such a manner, that I may hope not to tire the volatile, or offend the pious.

By the pious, I mean only the good people of our reformed religion, being aware that I must expect little or no mercy from a Catholic reader; for although I declare myself the friend and champion of the honest Protestant Old Maid, I am very far from being an advocate for monastic virginity. Indeed, it is with pity and indignation, that I consider how many thousand of the most lovely females have been immured, to languish in a cloister, by parental tyranny; or have been led, by the insinuating arts of superstition, to enter on a voluntary seclusion from all the most amiable duties and delights of human life. Though I am willing to believe, that sincere purity has often resided in a convent, I cannot but consider the Protestant Old Maid, who supports with chearful content a virginity, which is the consequence rather of accident and neces-

sity, than of choice, as a more exemplary and interesting personage than the Romish nun, who, in her zeal for chastity, renounces mankind for ever. I am convinced, that the former character, neglected and depreciated as it may have been, is more truly consonant to the genuine spirit of Christianity, that simple and sublime religion, which is a friend to social happiness, and an enemy to every selfish principle.

Since nature, reason, and faith may all incline us to co-operate in the preservation of our species, it is astonishing, that any powers could be found sufficient to counteract their united influence, and to make a number of human beings persist in renouncing the most precious privilege of their existence, the privilege of communicating their own enjoyments, both transient and eternal, to new beings, more dear to them than their own personal advantage. The severe pains of child-birth are graciously compensated by such a profusion of tender delight, that the most selfish timidity could

could not decline the burthen, after thinking on its reward. The more we reflect on the generous energy of the maternal feelings, the more shall we be surpris'd at the multitudes of women, who, in the first ages of Christianity, devoted themselves to a single life. The whole sex appears to have been inflamed with a passion for virginity; and a respectable author, who has lately given us an amusing history of women, informs us, that in the fourth century, a single city contained no less than twenty thousand virgins, who had taken a vow of perpetual chastity*. Notwithstanding the extreme humility which they professed, I am afraid there was a strong mixture of secret pride in this unreasonable conduct. All the primitive Christian maidens seem to have coveted such a sepulchral panegyric as the following couplet bestows on our queen Elizabeth;

* Alexander's History of Women, Oct. edit. p. 415, vol. II.—This book would be more valuable, if the ingenious writer had quoted his authorities.

*She was and is (what can there more be said?)
On earth the chief, in heaven the second
maid*.*

Perhaps the nuns of the ancient church had pretensions to this ideal sanctity less equivocal than those of our virgin queen. However this may be, it is a curious and interesting speculation to search into the immediate causes of such wonderful facts; and to examine the particular source of those ideas, that could so forcibly counteract the tender bias of nature in the female character of those times. The ardent zeal with which the early Christians embraced a life of celibacy, may be ascribed to two causes; first, to the advice of St. Paul, who strongly dissuades them from marriage; and secondly, to those flaming pieces of ecclesiastical eloquence, in which the fathers of the church were pleased to magnify virginity, and to pour into the heated imagination of their

* Camden's Remains, p. 524:

female disciples an unquenchable love for this imaginary virtue. As I advance in this Essay, I shall give a particular account of these remarkable orations. In the present chapter, I shall confine myself to consider the advice of St. Paul, and the immediate consequences which it seems to have produced.

I trust that I shall not be thought to fail in that respect, which every sincere Christian owes to this eloquent and admirable apostle, by declaring that I have frequently read his strong exhortation to a life of celibacy with surprise and concern. His Epistle to the Corinthians, in which he affirms, that it is better not to marry, instead of making me a convert to his opinion, induces me to exclaim with Milton,

*Our Maker bids increase ; who bids abstain
But our destroyer, foe to God and Man ?*

It is true indeed that St. Paul is very far from uttering such a prohibition ; and in his first Epistle to Timothy he foretels,
that

that this prohibitory doctrine shall arise from seducing spirits *. In the second chapter of the same Epistle, he appears to be so far from an advocate for celibacy, that he almost seems to intimate, that women must work out their salvation by the production of children † :—yet his address to the Corinthians is so pointed in favour of a single life, his sarcastic expression, “ It is better to marry than to burn,” might, to many weak, or prudish, or enthusiastic females, exhibit wedlock in such a degrading point of view, that perhaps his strong exhortation to a life of virginity might influence many of his maiden disciples, more forcibly than an absolute prohibition of marriage could have done. At all events, when we consider the extensive veneration which was justly paid to this apostle, we may fairly conclude, that the multitude of primitive Old Maids was infinitely increased by his First Epistle to the Corinthians. As St. Paul expressly tells

* 1 Tim. iv.

† 1 Tim. ii. 14.

us, in this Epistle, that, "concerning virgins, " he had no commandment of the Lord *;" we may question, without a shadow of impiety, the utility of his advice.—I confess, that at the first view, it appeared to my understanding not consistent with that benevolent and temperate wisdom, which certainly adorned the character of St. Paul. But the excellent Mr. Locke, in a note to his Paraphrase of this Epistle, suggests an idea that may justify the apostle's dissuasion from marriage, not as a general precept, but as a temporary counsel. It is supposed by our great Christian philosopher, that St. Paul might speak, in this Epistle, "*out of a prophetic foresight of the approaching persecution under Nero.*" On this supposition he might dissuade his disciples from marriage, not as an enemy to connubial enjoyments, but as fearing they would more sensibly feel the misery of their impending oppression, if they were torn from all the delightful comforts of a married life.

* Chap. vii. ver. 25.

However

However wise and well-timed the apostle's advice might be, we have reason to apprehend, that the extravagant attachment to virginity, which some of his female disciples conceived, was the occasion of many domestic quarrels, and much private distress. At least we have one memorable example of this effect, if we may give any credit to the marvellous adventures of his follower Thecla, who is celebrated by several fathers of the church as the first and most illustrious of the virgin martyrs. As the anecdotes of this lady are very remarkable, I shall extract a little sketch of her life from Jacobus Philippus Bergomensis, who published, in 1497, a Latin folio *on illustrious Women*, addressed to Beatrice queen of Bohemia.

“ Thecla was a native of Iconium, a city
 “ of Asia; she was born in an elevated
 “ rank of life, and possessed, with the advantages of birth, the superior attractions of
 “ beauty. Her mother Theoclia was preparing for the delight of marrying her
 “ daughter

“ daughter to a noble and comely youth,
 “ whose name was Thamirus, when St.
 “ Paul arriving in their city, happened to
 “ lodge in the house adjoining to that in
 “ which Thecla resided. The virgin was
 “ so fascinated by the eloquence of the
 “ apostle, that no intreaties could prevail
 “ on her to quit the window, where she had
 “ placed herself to hear him, and where she
 “ sat for three days without tasting any
 “ food *. Theoclia lamented, to the def-
 “ tined husband of her daughter, this won-
 “ derful fascination. But the lover and the
 “ parent were equally unsuccessful in their
 “ attempts to divert the maiden from her
 “ attachment to the preacher. The morti-
 “ fied Thamirus departed in anger, to en-
 “ quire into the character and doctrine of
 “ this new prophet, whose discourse had

* In fenestra itaque domûs suæ per triduum quasi
 sui oblita, ad audiendum hominem pellecta, sine ullo
 prorsus cibo confedit, ut inde a nemine amoveri potu-
 erit.

Jac. Bergomensis, page 61.

“ produced

" produced so marvellous an effect on his
 " alienated mistress. Having learned that
 " he was a Christian, who, by his exhorta-
 " tions, deterred virgins from wedlock, the
 " indignant lover gave full scope to his re-
 " sentment, and delivered the preacher in
 " bonds to the magistrate Sextilius, by
 " whose order he was committed to prison.
 " The devout Thecla, having bribed the
 " gaoler, contrived still to feast on the elo-
 " quence of the imprisoned apostle. Being
 " detected in her secret visits, she was car-
 " ried before the proconsul; where, being
 " solicited to fulfil her engagement with
 " Thamirus, she disdained to reply. The
 " enraged proconsul, ordering the apostle to
 " be scourged, and driven from the city,
 " condemned the obstinate virgin to perish
 " in the flames. But Thecla, being already
 " fortified by the instructions of Paul, and
 " arming herself with the sign of the cross,
 " escaped unhurt and triumphant from the
 " fire into which she was thrown; and,
 " quitting her native city, went to Antioch

“ with Paul. The præfect of Antioch be-
“ came enamoured of her beauty, and at-
“ tempted to violate her chastity ; but the
“ resolute virgin so vigorously resisted the
“ princely ravisher, that she beat his crown
“ from his head, tore his mantle asunder,
“ and threw him into a state of idiotism, or
“ frenzy. She was now accused of sor-
“ cery, and condemned to be devoured by
“ wild beasts. She marched, however, un-
“ daunted to her punishment ; and happily
“ found in her purity a preservative against
“ the fury of bears and lions. The heart
“ of the proconsul was softened by her mi-
“ raculous preservation ; and she obtained
“ her freedom.—After these adventures, she
“ had a joyful meeting with her preceptor
“ Paul at Smyrna ; and, having received
“ from him every instruction that could ren-
“ der her innocence more perfect, she retired
“ to Seleucia ; where, having communicated
“ her own virtues to many virgin compa-
“ nions, she closed a life of sanctity, il-
“ lustrated by many miracles, in the month
“ of

“ of October, and in the sixty-ninth year
 “ of our Lord.”

Such is the history which a reverend encomiast of the fair sex has given of this illustrious virgin; and it corresponds with the account of other pious biographers, who have expatiated on the merits of the chaste Thecla, in their various Lives of the Saints. The enlightened readers of our country will, perhaps, consider with an equal degree of incredulity the different adventures of this wonderful maiden. It is hardly more probable that St. Paul should instigate a young damsel to disobey her parent, and to violate a nuptial promise, than that the hungry and enraged beasts of the forest should be rendered harmless and gentle by the influence of virginity. But in whatever light these asserted facts may appear to the intelligent readers of our age and country, it is certain they were received, during many centuries, with implicit belief and veneration. The extraordinary merits of Thecla were a favourite to-

pic with many holy preachers, and St. Ambrose in particular descants upon them in so high a strain, that his discourse must have had great effect upon his virgin disciples. “ * Let Thecla,” exclaims the holy father, in the second division of his Treatise upon Virgins, “ let Thecla teach you to “ suffer martyrdom; who, flying from the “ bonds of matrimony, and condemned “ by the fury of her betrothed husband, “ changed even the nature of savage beasts, “ by inspiring them with reverence for virginity. When she was exposed to be “ devoured

* Thecla doceat immolari, quæ copulam fugiens nuptialem, et sponsi furore damnata, naturam etiam bestiarum virginitatis veneratione mutavit. Namque parata ad feras, cum aspectus quoque declinaret virorum, ac vitalia ipsa sæpe offerret leoni, fecit ut qui impudicos detulerant oculos, pudicos referrent. Cernere erat lingentem pedes bestiam, cubitare humi, muto testificantem sono, quod sacrum virginis corpus violare non posset. Ergo adorabat prædam suam bestia; et propriæ oblita naturæ, naturam induerat quam homines amiserant. Videres, quadam naturæ transfusione, homines feritate indutos sævitiam impetare

“ devoured, when she shrunk from the
 “ sight of men, and offered her vitals to
 “ the lion, she converted the cruel wan-
 “ tonnes of the spectators into a respect
 “ for modesty : then might you have seen
 “ a wild beast fawning at her feet, and tes-
 “ tifying, by a gentle murmur, that he had
 “ not power to violate the sacred body of
 “ a virgin. The savage adored his prey,
 “ and, forgetting his own natural qualities,
 “ assumed that nature which man had
 “ thrown off. You might see, by this in-

rare bestię; bestiam exosculantem pedes virginis,
 docere quid homines facere deberent. Tantum ha-
 bet virginitas admirationis, ut eam etiam leones mi-
 rentur. Non impastos cibus flexit, non citatos impe-
 tus rapuit, non stimulos ira exasperavit, non usus
 decepit assuetos, non feros natura possedit; docuerunt
 religionem, dum adorant martyrem; docuerunt etiam
 castitatem, dum virgini nihil aliud nisi plantas exos-
 culantur, demersis in terram oculis, tanquam verecun-
 dantibus, *ne mas aliquis vel bestia virginem nudam*
 videret.

Divi Ambrosii de Virginibus,
 lib. ii. p. 80.

L 3

“ terchange

“ terchange of nature, man assuming fero-
“ city, and commanding a beast to be
“ cruel ; and a beast instructing man in his
“ duty, by kissing the feet of a virgin. So
“ truly admirable is virginity, that even
“ lions revere it ! The sight of their prey
“ did not allure them, though exasperated
“ by hunger ; anger did not provoke
“ them, though stimulated by the rage of
“ the people ; their custom of devouring
“ criminals did not deceive them ; their
“ natural qualities ceased to operate upon
“ them ! They taught us religion, by adoring
“ the martyr ; they taught us even chastity,
“ by confining their kisses to the feet of the
“ maiden, declining their eyes to the earth,
“ as if ashamed that any male creature,
“ though only a savage beast, should look
“ upon a naked virgin.”

When the merits of Thecla were thus celebrated by one of the most popular and eloquent of the episcopal saints, we may reasonably imagine that female ambition was universally awakened : the warm imagination

gination of pious maidens was heated to such a pitch of enthusiasm, that a passion for the glory of martyrdom extinguished all their natural affections; instead of wishing to become the mothers of well-educated children, they desired only the purity and the renown of Thecla, to be adored by lions, and extolled by saints. How far the most eminent fathers of the church conspired to inflame and perpetuate this supernatural ambition in the tender sex, I shall endeavour to shew in some succeeding chapters, concluding the present with a few remarks on the illustrious Thecla.—This holy maiden, being celebrated as the familiar friend and disciple of an apostle, was generally considered as a model for every well-disposed virgin; and, perhaps, in the very long list of female saints, it is impossible to pitch on any individual, whose miraculous adventures had so powerful an effect in diffusing an universal ardour for the honours of virginity, and increasing the multitude of Old Maids. Nor is it in the dark

ages alone that we meet with panegyrics on the immaculate Thecla. In the sixteenth century, she inspired a Doctor of the Sorbonne with poetry. Claude d'Espence, who is styled by his biographer the most judicious and moderate doctor of his time, composed, in Latin verse, an heroic epistle from Thecla to St. Paul *.

* Printed at Paris, 1619, in a folio, containing all the Latin works of D'Espence.

C H A P. II.

*On some of the most early Christian Authors,
who have touched on Virginity—Tertullian
—St. Cyprian.—On the Canonical Virgins.*

SOME ages elapsed before the Christian virgins were settled in regular communities; it was not till the close of the fourth century, that the first nunnery was erected, in Verona, by Zeno, the bishop of that city *. But the Christian writers of a much

* See Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, translated by Maclaine, vol. i. p. 307.—The origin of nunneries is a point involved in considerable obscurity, and has given birth to many pious and dull disputes. St. Syncletica, of Alexandria, has been celebrated as the mother of Nuns, as St. Antony has been revered as the father of Monks; but the history of this holy parent of religious Old Maids is not very clearly established. The curious reader, who wishes to consult the various opinions concerning her, may find them collected

much earlier date abundantly prove, that multitudes of pious maidens had devoted themselves to a single life, before any convents were raised for their reception.

Tertullian, who wrote in the second and third century, composed a very curious treatise, to persuade these holy virgins to cover their faces with a veil; and one argument that he urges for this practice is so singular, that I cannot forbear to insert it:—He tells them, it is highly proper to shade a countenance of such dangerous power as to occasion the fall of angels from heaven (alluding to the text of Genesis, in which the sons of God are said to have been connected with the daughters of men); “for who can presume,” says Tertullian, “that such angels would chuse to cohabit with the relics of mortal impurity, and not rather burn for virginity, that flower,

lected in the preliminary dissertation to an elaborate work, intituled, *Histoire des Ordres Monastiques, Religieux & Militaires*, printed at Paris, in eight quarto volumes.

“ which

“ which even excuses the incontinence of
“ man * ? ”

The next eminent Christian writer, who treats expressly of virgins, is St. Cyprian; who has addressed to them a discourse of admonition on their conduct and apparel. The good bishop of Carthage declaims against ear-rings, paint, and false hair, as inventions of the devil, inconsistent with that simplicity of habit by which virgins should be distinguished. He exhorts them to avoid public baths and nuptial feasts; he felicitates them on their escaping the curse of child-birth; and encourages them to persevere in their chastity, by an assurance, that their rank is glorious, and that the purity of a virgin approaches very near to the perseverance of a martyr †.

* *Quis præsumere potest, tales angelos maculata jam corpora et humanæ libidinis reliquias desiderasse, ut non ad virgines potius exarserint, quarum flos etiam humanam libidinem excusat.*

Tertull. de Virgin. Veland. p. 222.

† *Quarum ad gloriam merces secunda est, sit et virtus ad tolerantiam proxima. Sanct. Cyprian.*

de Habitu Virg. p. 102.

Such

Such is the general tenor of St. Cyprian's address to the pious sisterhood; but I cannot collect any light, either from Cyprian or Tertullian, concerning the number of Christian females, who had in their times made a public profession of virginity. There are, however, two circumstances, which may induce us to believe, that these holy maidens amounted, even at this period, to an immense multitude.—In the first place, a veneration for celibacy was carried to such excesses in the second century, that many preachers declaimed against marriage as the suggestion of the devil. This gloomy doctrine is said to have been first taught by Saturninus of Antioch. The learned Bingham, in his *Christian Antiquities*, has enumerated many sects who were addicted to this, perhaps the most absurd of all superstitions; which yet prevailed to such a degree, and was so forcibly supported by Eustathius, a preacher of the fourth century, that, to use the words of Bingham, “ many women forsook their
“ husbands,

“ husbands, and husbands their wives, from
 “ the persuasion, that no one who lived in a
 “ married state could have any hope in
 “ God.”

The prevalence of such an idea had certainly a strong tendency to increase the number of those religious maidens, who, still residing under the roof of their parents, yet made a public profession of virginity, by enrolling their names in the book or canon of the church, and thence acquired the title of Canonical Virgins.

But there was a second circumstance, peculiar to this early period, which had, perhaps, an effect equally powerful and extensive in augmenting this maiden community; I mean a very extraordinary custom, which crept into the primitive church, to the scandal of the good, and the entertainment of the licentious, the custom (condemned indeed by saints and councils, yet sometimes avowed and vindicated by its adherents) which permitted the canonical virgins to attach themselves to a favourite preceptor,

preceptor, and even to share his bed, without ceasing to make a public profession of their virginity.

This fact is so singular, that the modern sceptical reader may incline, perhaps, to question the truth of it. Many witnesses concur in its support; and, as the consideration of so strange a custom may instruct us in the state of ancient manners, I doubt not but the more discreet virgins of the present age will thank me for exhibiting to their view the very dangerous temerity of their primitive sisters.

Among the Epistles of St. Cyprian, there is one addressed to Pomponius, which shews us, in very explicit language, the good bishop's opinion of these resolute, or rather rash virgins, who, confessing that they slept with men, still asserted their integrity*. The saint very forcibly con-

* Quæ se cum viris dormisse confessæ sint, asseverare se integras esse. Sanct. Cyp. Epist. iv.

demns their conduct; and justly observes, that, however innocent they may be, no one can long be safe, who approaches so near to danger. Saint Cyprian proceeds to censure the boldness of those more determined virgins, who attempted to justify their perseverance in so perilous a practice:—"Let not any one," says the wary saint, "consider herself as sufficiently excused or defended, by offering her person to the test of inspection, since the professional judges of virginity are frequently deceived *." From these singular expressions, we may conceive how strenuously the canonical virgins contended for the maintenance of this tempting, though dangerous custom, which, to use the metaphor of Dodwell, "had taken deep root in the church."—This learned commentator on St. Cyprian has il-

* Nec aliqua putet se hac excusatione defendi, quod inspicere et probari possit, an virgo sit; cum et manus obstetricum et oculus sæpè fallatur.

Sanct. Cyp. Epist. iv.

illustrated

illustrated the custom, that I am now speaking of, in a Latin dissertation. He affirms it was first introduced into the Christian church by Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch, who was perpetually attended by two of these fair and faithful virgin disciples. The practice became so common, that the canonical virgins, who thus cohabited with their pastors, were distinguished by a particular Greek appellation *. Many of the fathers declaimed with great energy against this class of virgins; and the eloquent St. Chrysostom, in particular, has left us an animated discourse on this unorthodox cohabitation, divided into two parts; the first addressed to females, and the second, to his own sex. From this division, it seems probable, that the more wealthy pious maidens admitted indigent preachers to reside under their roof; while, on the other hand, the wealthy priest afforded a similar refuge to the poor canonical virgin. This friendly

* ΣΥΝΕΙΣΘΗΤΟΙ.

and tender intercourse was often perhaps very innocent; but, as it afforded much room for licentious surmises against the clergy, it was expressly prohibited by the council of Nice. The warm and eloquent Chrysostom begins his address to these inconsiderate virgins with the most pathetic lamentation:—"Virginity (says the indignant saint) the most honourable of all conditions, has now incurred the most humiliating disgrace; and it suffers, not from its enemies, but from those who still presume to profess themselves its faithful votaries.—There were a few individuals among the Greeks, who, by the aid of philosophy, were enabled to triumph over avarice and anger; but the flower of virginity never flourished among them. In this point they have always acknowledged our manifest superiority; confessing that such purity was above the reach of nature, and did not belong to our species*. It was in this point that all the

* Οὐκ ἀνθρώπων.

VOL. II.

M

" Gentiles

“ Gentiles have marvelled at our perfec-
 “ tion—but they can admire it no longer;
 “ and their admiration is turned into
 “ laughter and derision. The devil at-
 “ tacked us in this band, because he per-
 “ ceived that our virgins were the most ef-
 “ fulgent phalanx in all the host of Chris-
 “ tians; but he has so confounded this
 “ phalanx, that it *would be better for us in*
 “ *future to have no virgins at all, if they can*
 “ *thus be driven to neglect their duty* *. The
 “ cause of all these evils is this, that virgin
 “ purity exists only in name, while the ef-
 “ fence of it is supposed to be confined to
 “ the body, which is the least part of vir-
 “ ginity: the more essential parts, and
 “ those which chiefly denote it, are dis-
 “ regarded; they have ceased to distin-
 “ guish themselves by decency of habit, by
 “ the silence which becomes a virgin, by
 “ compunction, and other marks of a reli-
 “ gious spirit.”

* Ως βελτιον ειναι λοιπον μηδε παρθενης ειναι τας ετι
 το τραγμα μετιεναι επιχειρουσας.

Such is the language, in which St. Chrysostom begins his exhortation to those professed virgins, who permitted men to dwell under their roof: in the course of it, the saint grows so vehement in his anger, as even to hint at burying the fair offenders alive; but, since that privilege is not allowed him, he contents himself with indignant lamentation. He mentions one circumstance, which exhibits, in a most striking point of view, the gross indelicacy of ancient manners:—"Every day," says he, "the
 " midwives are running to the houses of
 " virgins, as if hastening to a labour; yet
 " not to assist one in the pangs of child-
 " birth (though even this indeed has hap-
 " pened to some of them) but that they
 " may be examined, like young female
 " slaves, when they are purchased, to dis-
 " cover which has been violated and which
 " is pure. One has readily acquiesced in
 " this probation—another has refused it;
 " and by this refusal is reduced to shame,
 " even if she is still uncorrupted. One has

“ suffered, another has not suffered; yet
“ the latter is put to shame not less than the
“ former, as being unable to obtain credit
“ for her purity, and wanting the evidence
“ of such an inquisition.”

What a disgusting idea of the fourth century (the age of Chrysostom) does this anecdote present to us! I have translated this singular passage from the faint very faithfully, for my maiden readers, at the extreme hazard of offending their delicacy—I have ventured to incur this painful hazard, in the hope of thus guarding them against an infirmity, which is sometimes objected to Old Maids; I mean the infirmity of railing against their own time, and preferring past ages to the present. The good spinster, who justly considers the point of view in which St. Chrysostom exhibits the virgins of his century, will bless her stars that she was born in our happier days, when the dignity of the virgin character is supported with more ease and grace, and when the calumniated maiden can gain credit

credit for her innocence, without being reduced to such a shameful test of her integrity. The severe St. Chrysostom would not allow the opulent virgin to retain even a male servant under her roof. He laughs at those who made the infirmity of their health a plea for this indulgence; and he draws a very ludicrous picture of those nocturnal occurrences, which his warm imagination suggested to him as arising in the houses, where the virgin mistress was attended by a male domestic. Having endeavoured to prove, that women only ought to wait upon women, he closes his address to his female disciples, by displaying, in the most magnificent imagery, those high honours, to which immaculate virgins are entitled.

“Remember,” says the eloquent enthusiast, “in what quarter of the battle you are stationed—it is yours to stand and combat round the leader of the conflict, round the person of the king himself.—As in every war the whole army cannot

“ occupy the same ground, but some are
“ posted in the wings, some in the cen-
“ tre, some in the rear, and some in the
“ front of the array; while others, wher-
“ ever the king appears, appear also, and
“ co-operate on every side with him; thus
“ to the chosen band of virgins is this post
“ of honour allotted:—nor is it more the
“ office of those attendants who are decked
“ with habiliments of gold, who ride on
“ horses adorned with golden trappings,
“ who carry the golden armour and the re-
“ gal gems, to denote the presence of their
“ king, than it is the office of a virgin to
“ shew the presence of her lord: these at-
“ tendants, indeed, appear round the regal
“ chariot of their sovereign; but the virgin
“ may, if she is willing, be like the cheru-
“ bim, and herself become the chariot of
“ her king.”

Such are the dazzling and extravagant
flights of faintly eloquence, by which the
females of the primitive church were al-
lured to a life of celibacy. Nature very

wisely made the mutual attraction of the two sexes so very strong, that the most vehement efforts of superstition often failed in attempting to keep them asunder, though the most brilliant and seducing rhetorick was assiduouſly employed for this purpose.

Saint Chryſoſtom, in the ſecond part of his diſcourſe, where he addreſſes himſelf to the prieſts who kept canonical virgins under their roof, very candidly acknowledges, that it is pleaſant to reſide with women, excluſive of any matrimonial or licentious enjoyment ; but he endeavours to convince the clergy, who indulged themſelves in this temperate pleaſure, and aſſerted its innocence, that their condition was little better than that of Tantalus. He enumerates the many evils that may ariſe to man from reſiding with a female, even without a violation of their mutual chaſtity ; and he compares a prieſt, who has enervated his mind by ſuch a gratification, to a poor lion, whoſe mane has been cut off, whoſe teeth and talons have

been taken from him, and who is metamorphosed from the tremendous lord of the forest into a wretched animal weak and ridiculous.

Vigilant and solicitous as the fathers were to prevent this domestic connection between the priests and virgins, there were many obstinate offenders, who resisted and despised their public exhortations, and their private advice. The authority of the great St. Basil himself was not sufficient to prevail on an aged priest, whose name was Paregorius, to dismiss a canonical virgin residing in his house : it appears, from a letter still extant, addressed by St. Basil to this old delinquent, that he pleaded the age of seventy as his excuse, and resolutely opposed the severity of his malicious superior, who had attempted to rob his declining life of so innocent a comfort. St. Basil, however, is very far from admitting this apology ; and closes his letter with a vehement threat of excommunication, if the aged Paregorius still
fondly

fondly persisted in his attachment to his fair attendant.

Love and religion are often found together; and are never, perhaps, so warm and vehement, as when they are united. The priest, who attached himself to a canonical virgin, with the endearing appellation of sister, was gradually, and perhaps insensibly, led to the highest pitch of disinterested passion. The writings of Athanasius have incidentally preserved to us a very memorable example of the strange excesses that may arise from this ardent affection:—The archbishop of Alexandria, declaiming against the wickedness and impudence of his antagonists the Arians, in his first apology, asserts that, instead of being ashamed of the crimes imputed to them, they persevered, without a blush, in their offences. “Leontius,” continues the primate, “being censured on account of a young woman called Eustolia, and forbid to cohabit with her, *made himself a eunuch* “for

“ *for her sake* *, that he might continue to dwell with her in security.” In his epistle to the Monks, Athanasius speaks again of this disinterested lover; and he there expressly affirms, that “ Leontius had made this voluntary sacrifice of himself for the liberty of sleeping with Eustolia, his wife, according to his own account,” (says the angry Saint) “ though still called a virgin.”—The good-natured reader, who will consider the generous frailty of Leontius with less severity than Athanasius did, may rejoice, perhaps, to be informed, that the loss of manhood did not prevent this affectionate enthusiast from rising to a mitre. The same austere saint, who has indignantly recorded his marvellous and unorthodox attachment to his Eustolia, has told us, with equal indignation, that he was made a bishop.

Of all the tender martyrs of love, Leontius has, perhaps, the strongest title to our

* ΔΙ' ΑΥΤΗΝ ΕΑΥΤΟΝ ΑΠΕΡΟΨΕΝ.

compassionate admiration; and I am induced to recommend his history to our poets, from a persuasion that, in the hands of some impassioned genius, his *Eustolia* might form a pleasing companion, and a potent rival, to the pathetic and enchanting *Eloise* of Pope.—Before I close this short account of the prohibited domestic connection between priests and professed virgins, it may be proper to observe, that Dodwell supposes this custom to have descended to the primitive clergy from the most illustrious of the Pagan sages*. This learned critic imagines, that many an honest heathen Old Maid attached herself to some eminent philosopher of her time, and was contented with his doctrine, without aspiring to his caresses: he mentions the intimacy of Cicero and Cerellia as a case in

* Erant enim apud Ethnicos etiam sceminæ, quæ philosophiæ prætextu virorum familiaritati assuecerent.—Inde συνησικατων ecclesiasticorum profluxerit exemplum a viris etiam magnis philosophicisque commendatum.

Diff. Cyp. iii.

point.

point. That such an innocent but dangerous attachment has existed, even in modern days, we have a memorable and a mournful instance in the history of Swift and Stella. That singular genius had the talent and the inclination to sport very cruelly with the passions of women; but, as his ingenious and more manly godson and biographer very candidly confesses, without the power to indulge them *. This ingenuous confession is, perhaps, the best of all possible apologies for the misanthropical spirit imputed to Swift; for they must be imperfect and uncandid judges of human infirmities, who do not expect to find, and who cannot readily pardon, a large portion of misanthropy in a great but unhappy character, immaturely deprived, or never perhaps possessed, of so common yet so invaluable a faculty.—But peace to the ashes of this admirable writer! and peace to those of that fairer object of our compassion, his un-

* See Mr. Sheridan's Life of Swift.

fortunate Stella, who had the strange misfortune of uniting those discordant titles, Wife, and Old Maid ! May her severe and unmerited fate be an eternal lesson to every sensible and warm-hearted spinster, not to contemplate with too tender an admiration, either the wisdom or the wit of any cold philosopher !

C H A P. III.

*On Methodius, Bishop of Olympus, and his
Banquet of Virgins.*

A SPIRIT of pious gallantry so inflamed the first writers of the church, that their pens were incessantly employed in the praise of consecrated virgins. Among the early episcopal champions of the sisterhood, Methodius was particularly distinguished by the purity of his zeal, and the Platonic form of his composition. We have but few personal circumstances transmitted to us concerning this elegant encomiast of virginity; who being first bishop of Olympus, and afterwards of Tyre, closed his scene of religious glory by acquiring the palm of martyrdom in the persecution of Dioclesian. Of the many writings which he is said to have left, one alone has escaped the ravages of time, and this, although its
title

title was sufficient to awaken curiosity and regard, did not find an editor till about the middle of the last century: it is entitled, "The Banquet of Virgins," and bears an evident resemblance to the celebrated Banquet of Plato. Love had formed the great theme of panegyric in the dialogue of the Pagan philosopher, and virginity is treated in a similar manner in the chaster composition of the Christian bishop. I trust, that my fair readers will eagerly receive an account of this curious performance, and the more so, if I first relate to them an anecdote, from which it will appear, that the Banquet of Virgins, even before its publication, attracted the attention of a queen, a famous and learned queen, who had the ambition, like our Elizabeth, to rank herself in the order of Old Maids, though on a very dubious and disputed title.

In the Paris edition of Methodius by Pierre Poussines, a French Jesuit, who resided at Rome, there is a letter from the editor to his friend Henri de Valois, which
gives

gives an amusing account of a literary morning, that he passed in the Vatican library with several men of letters, and their royal patroness Christina of Sweden. Among the curious volumes that Holsten, the librarian, presented to the company, there was a copy of Methodius: on the sight of it, the queen of Sweden said immediately to Poussines, "Here is the book
" that we eagerly expect from you," alluding to his translation of the Greek text, which he had just completed, at the request of his friend the librarian. Before the Jesuit could reply to this flattering compliment, a man of distinguished learning, he tells us, interposed in this mortifying manner: "From me, most illustrious
" queen, is the Banquet of Methodius to
" be expected; I have occupied this
" ground, nor shall I yield it to any one."
—"I was struck dumb," says the unlucky Jesuit, "I confess; for how could I oppose a person, my superior in age, connected with me in friendship, a favourite

“ at Rome, and honoured, indeed, in all
 “ countries for his singular merit. While
 “ I was inwardly lamenting my own fruit-
 “ less labour,” continues Poussines, “ the
 “ queen took me aside, and said, “ What
 “ can we do in this business? have you
 “ no expedient to propose?”—“ None,”
 replied the modest though mortified Jesuit,
 “ but to withdraw, as becomes my time of
 “ life and my profession.”

With the letter thus relating his disap-
 pointment, and dated in 1656, Poussines
 sent a copy of his *Methodius* to his learned
 friend at Paris, and in the following year
 it was handsomely printed in folio, at the
 royal press of that city. Though Poussines
 does not mention the name of his successful
 rival on this occasion, yet we know, from
 the octavo edition of *Methodius*, published
 at Rome in the preceding year by the cele-
 brated Leo Allatius, that he was the learned
 person alluded to in the letter of the Jesuit.
 —But let us turn from the Editors to the
 work itself.

The Banquet of Methodius contains a series of orations, pronounced by eleven virgins, in honour of virginity. To the eloquence of these fair and chaste orators we are introduced by the following conversation, between Gregorium, a female attendant of the virgins, and Eubulius, supposed to be a borrowed name for the pious author of the dialogue.

“ EUBULIUS.

“ You are come very seasonably, Gregorium; for I was lately in quest of you, from a desire to learn some particulars concerning the assembly of Marcella, Theopatra, and the other virgins collected at the banquet, and chiefly concerning their discourses on chastity; for it is said, they contended on that topic with such spirit and energy, that they omitted nothing which could illustrate their subject: if, therefore, you are come on any other business, wave it at present, and do not hesitate to give me the circumstantial narrative I request of you.

“ GREGORIUM.

“ GREGORIUM.

“ It seems I am disappointed in my
 “ hope, and another has got the start of
 “ me, in relating to you the incidents of
 “ which you enquire. Being persuaded
 “ that you had not heard a syllable of what
 “ has happened, I piqued myself on my
 “ solicitude to bring you the first intelli-
 “ gence: it was on this account I hastened
 “ hither as fast as I could, being very
 “ anxious that no one should anticipate my
 “ intention.

“ EUBULIUS.

“ Be comforted; for, indeed, my good
 “ friend, I have heard none of the parti-
 “ culars circumstantially. My informer
 “ could only tell me, that such dialogues
 “ arose; but when I requested an exact
 “ account of them, he confessed his ig-
 “ norance.

“ GREGORIUM.

“ Do you wish, as I really came for this
 “ purpose, to hear every thing that was
 “ said, or shall I pass over some things,

“ and relate only what I think worthy of
“ recollection ?

“ EUBULIUS.

“ Just so. But first inform me, Grego-
“ rium, where the assembly was held ; tell
“ me what was the collection of their vi-
“ ands, and how you poured to them their
“ wine,

————— “ *while in their golden cups*
“ *They pledg'd each other, looking up to*
“ *Heaven* *.

“ GREGORIUM.

“ You are always dreadfully learned in
“ conversation, Eubulius ; for you make
“ all others appear ignorant.

“ EUBULIUS.

“ There is no occasion for you, Grego-
“ rium, to rally me at present on this
“ point ; but, as I have requested, tell me,

* A quotation from the opening of the fourth
Iliad, with the variation of a few words to suit the
purpose of the pious author.

“ without

“ without farther preface, the whole process
“ from the beginning.

“ GREGORIUM.

“ I will attempt it.—But first answer me,
“ Do you know Arete, the daughter of
“ Philosophy?

“ EUBULIUS.

“ Affuredly.

“ GREGORIUM.

“ Being invited into her garden, I mean
“ that towards the east, we proceeded to
“ feast on the fruits in season; ‘And I (said
“ Theopatra to me, for I collected all the
“ particulars from her *) I, and Procilla,
“ and Tyfiana, walked over a very rough,
“ difficult, and arduous road; but when
“ we approached,’ continued Theopatra,
“ ‘to the spot, a majestic and comely wo-
“ man, advancing with gentle grace, and
“ clad in a garment of snowy splendor,

* This is an awkward parenthesis; it would have been better if Gregorium had begun by saying, she spoke only in the character of Theopatra, and was not herself present at the banquet.

N 3

“ received

“ received us. She was, in truth, all celest-
“ tial, inimitable beauty ; a modest fanc-
“ tity adorned her countenance ; her look
“ expressed both austerity and mildness,
“ united in a such a pleasing manner, as I
“ never saw before ; in all points she ap-
“ peared negligent of her charms, and wore
“ no foreign ornament. This personage,
“ advancing with much joy, caressed each
“ of us with the endearments of a long ab-
“ sent mother : ‘ O my daughters,’ she
“ exclaimed, ‘ you have with difficulty
“ reached me, eager to conduct you into
“ the field of perfection, after a journey in
“ which you have been alarmed by a va-
“ riety of reptiles ; for I surveyed you
“ from this eminence, often staggered in
“ your approach, and I was afraid lest ye
“ might perish by a fall from the preci-
“ pice ; but thanks to that bridegroom, to
“ whom I have united you, my children,
“ and who has accomplished all things ac-
“ cording to our prayers.’ Having said
“ this, ‘ Let us advance,’ she cried, ‘ within
“ the

" the boundary, as the gates are yet open.'
 " On our entrance, we found Thecla,
 " Agatha, and Marcella, prepared for the
 " banquet. She told me, that Arete im-
 " mediately said, ' You also take your
 " places here by these your companions ;'
 " for we now happily amounted to the
 " number ten. The scene was superna-
 " tural in beauty, and full of perfect tran-
 " quillity ; the air which pervaded it was
 " blended with the purest light, and was of
 " the softest temperature. In the centre, a
 " stream as smooth as oil afforded the
 " sweetest beverage ; its water, limpid and
 " pure, formed itself into fountains, which,
 " spreading like a river, supplied all the
 " garden with many copious rills. The
 " trees were of various kinds, and rich in
 " their recent burthens. Great was the
 " beauty of their fruit, that *hung amiable* *.
 " The ground was decorated with never-

* The Greek expression here has a singular resemblance to the words of Milton, καρπὼν ἀπεωρουμένων
 ἡλαθως.

“ fading and variegated flowers, that dif-
 “ fused the sweetest fragrance. Near us
 “ was a lofty agnus castus *, under which we
 “ rested, because it was extensive and shady.

“ EUBULIUS.

“ Happy woman ! you appear to me to
 “ be describing a second Paradise.

“ GREGORIUM.

“ Your remark is just.—As soon, there-
 “ fore, as we had partaken of every dainty
 “ refreshment and various recreation, so
 “ that no delight was wanting, she said
 “ that Arete thus introduced the subject :
 “ — ‘ O my young damsels, the boast and
 “ pride of my aspiring spirit ! O ye lovely
 “ maidens, who cultivate the unploughed
 “ fields of Christ with your virgin hands †,
 “ enough of food and feasting, for with us
 “ all things are in perfect plenty. What
 “ therefore remains for me to wish or to

* A tree so called, and sacred to chastity.

† Ω καλλιπαρθενοι της ανηροτους Χριστη γεωργουσαι
 λιμωνας ανυμφευτοις χερσι. Methodii, p. 5. edit. Par.

“ require ?

" require ? That each of you would favour
 " me with a speech upon virginity. Let
 " Marcella begin, since she is first in place,
 " and also the senior ; and when she has
 " well exercised her talents, I will take
 " shame to myself if I do not render her an
 " object of envy, by fixing on her brow the
 " spotless foliage of wisdom. On this, * she
 " said, Marcella immediately began."

As I fear the majority of modern readers
 would not relish the pious prolixity of these
 rhetorical virgins, I shall only introduce a
 little summary of their respective orations.

Marcella begins her discourse with an
 assertion, that virginity is supernaturally
 great, wonderful, and glorious, and that it
 requires a lofty soul to support it. She
 considers it as a plant sent immediately
 from Heaven, and unknown to the first
 ages of the world. She represents God as
 purifying human nature by degrees, like a

* Theopatra, in whose words Gregorium describes
 the scene.

master leading his infant scholars through the rudiments of language to the sublimest contemplations; permitting, in the infancy of the world, promiscuous marriage between brothers and sisters, refining wedlock by degrees, and at length recommending, in the person of Christ, a life of voluntary continence, as the summit of rational perfection. She concludes with a long passage from the fourteenth chapter of Revelations, to prove that the order of virgins has the first distinction in heaven, though inferior in number to other societies in the celestial host.

Theophila, the second of the female orators, considering the speech of Marcella as a little too severe upon marriage, asserts the innocence and the dignity of procreation, in language that discovers her to be a wonderful adept in all the mysteries of nature, particularly as she speaks in the character of a sequestered virgin. She is interrupted by Marcella; and the two maidens enter into some altercation on the possibility of
4 producing

producing an infant in opposition to the will of God. Theophila adjusts their difference by illustrating, in a figurative manner, the formation of an embryo: she vindicates the human frame as the exquisite work of divine power; she affirms, that even those children who are licentiously begotten, are assigned to the protection of tutelary angels; she compares the church to a rich and variegated field, adorned with the *flowers both of continence and propagation**: but, although she maintains the honour of marriage, she concludes with declaring the pre-eminence of virginity.

The third speaker is distinguished by the poetical name of Thalia; who is anxious to obviate the ill effects which she supposes to have arisen from a misconstruction of the divine command, *Increase and multiply*. For this purpose she contends, that all things said of Adam and Eve, in the Mosaic history, should be understood in a figurative

* Αἰθερίν τῆς τεχνουργίας καὶ τῆς εὐκρατείας.

sense,

sense, as alluding to the connection between Christ and the church. Thalia then examines and illustrates the art, the energy, and the design of St. Paul, in his exhortation to celibacy; she insists on his expression, *It is good for a man not to touch a woman* *; and she contends, that the apostle's allowance of wedlock is like an indulgence granted to the sick, of eating forbidden food upon a solemn fast.—Such are the heads of Thalia's oration; which is, however, so copious, that Eubulius exclaims, when the recital of it is finished, “Well, “Gregorium, she has at last reached the “shore, after traversing a wide ocean of “words!” The good man expresses, at the same time, an eager desire to hear the residue of these chaste and pious harangues: upon which Gregorium proceeds to the speech of Theopatra. This virgin delivers only a concise encomium on chastity, with a few texts of scripture very fancifully interpreted.

* 1 Cor. i. 7.

Thallusa,

Thallusa, the fifth orator, enforces many religious precepts for the conduct of a maiden's life; and concludes with observing, that gold is an excellent symbol of virginity, in two particulars; first, as it is of a shining nature, and, secondly, not subject to rust.

Agatha, who now takes her part in the dialogue, gives a singular caution to her own sex, by remarking, *that lovers are the devil and his agents* *; a position which she endeavours to illustrate by a prolix and curious comment on the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in scripture.

Procilla, who speaks in the seventh place, represents Christ as the great encomiast of virginity, by a strange misapplication of the uxorious poetry of Solomon.

Thecla hastens, with great eagerness, to deliver the eighth oration; and, as she begins to speak, she is complimented by Arete, as a person superior to all her sex in

* Ερασται εινω ο διαβολος, &c.

religious doctrine, and particularly instructed by the apostle St. Paul. The speech of Thecla is far from answering the expectation which her character excites. She begins with a kind of pun on the Greek word which expresses virginity*; she proceeds to a dissertation on the great and red dragon of the Apocalypse, exhorting all virgins to the most resolute resistance of this formidable monster. Having concluded what she had to advance on the general topic, she desires permission to pronounce a second discourse, against a vain and wicked belief in the influence of the stars; and she supports, with so much spirit, the free agency of man, that Eubulius expresses his admiration, in a lively panegyric on the force and splendor of her eloquence.

Tysiana, the ninth virgin of the assembly, pronounces a mystical harangue on the feast of tabernacles, in Leviticus.

Domnina, the tenth and last among the

* Πανθεια γαρ η παρθενια.

guests of Arete, begins her discourse by declaring, that no person under the old law could be acceptable to God, nor till virginity, under the auspices of Christ, began to reign over nature. She affirms, that this happy dominion of chastity was clearly foretold in the book of Judges, by the fable of the trees electing a sovereign; alledging, that the plant Rhamnus, which in our version of the Bible is denominated *the bramble*, is a just and proper symbol of virginity.

Arete now closes the conversation, by remarking, that purity of mind and body are equally essential to constitute the perfect virgin. She proceeds to commend and to crown the ten maiden orators; and the entertainment concludes with religious singing, Thecla taking the principal part, and the rest of the assembly joining in the following chorus, which is frequently repeated:

“ For thee I am chaste; and, possessing
 “ a resplendent lamp, O bridegroom, I rise
 “ to meet thee.”

Upon

Upon Gregorium's finishing her account of the banquet, Eubulius starts this curious and delicate question: "Which are the
" better virgins, they who are chaste from
" a quiet purity of constitution, or they
" who in practising this virtue are obliged
" to struggle with desire?"

Gregorium hastily decides in favour of the first; but Eubulius arguing the point with her, much in the manner of Plato, at last convinces her, by allusions to the physician who subdues a fever, and to the pilot who passes through a storm, that the palm of honour is certainly due to those maidens who have laboured through a fiery trial, and successfully contended with an imperious passion.

Such is the Banquet of Methodius; which, though certainly the production of a pious and elegant mind, is so little adapted to modern taste and manners, that I dared not venture on a more ample description of it. The preceding abridgment may, I think, be amusing to many readers, as it will render

der them acquainted with a singular composition but little known, and as it forcibly shews, that, among the early pastors of the church, one of the favourite points that piety and learning pursued, was to increase the multitude of Old Maids.

C H A P. IV.

*On the Saints who have written Panegyrics
on Virginity—St. Athanasius.*

AS many most eminent fathers of the church appear to have contended for the palm of eloquence on this tempting ground, and successively exerted all their powers of persuasion in magnifying the merits of virginity, I intend to give a little sketch of their respective compositions, in chronological order.—The next holy encomiast, who seems to have honoured the canonical virgins with an express panegyric, is the celebrated Athanasius, who became bishop of Alexandria in the year 326. Though we find, in the printed works of this illustrious saint, a little treatise in praise of virginity, it is proper to remark, that the most judicious of the Catholic critics will not allow this to be the genuine production
of

of Athanasius. It consists of good advice to the pious virgin on the articles of dress and prayer; it exhorts her never to plunge her whole body into water, nor to take even the liberty of looking at herself when she is naked.

In speaking of holy meditation, Athanasius, or whoever the author may be, has a passage that strikes me as sublime: "Remember," says he, "the twelfth hour; for in that our Saviour descended into hell; hell shuddered in beholding him, and cried aloud, Who is he that cometh with great power? who is he that tram- pleth on the brazen portals of hell, and unbindeth the chain of my captives?"

In the close of this treatise, after deliver- ing many precepts in a very clear and simple style, the author breaks forth into a fervid and magnificent panegyric on virginity, which he calls a precious pearl, not visible to the multitude, and found only by few*.

* Ω παρθενία μαργαριτα τίμιε, παρά πολλοῖς ἀφανής, ἀλγοῖς δὲ μονοῖς εὐρεῖσκόμενος!

He concludes with the following remarkable expression: "These things have I written to thee, my dear sister, thou *dancing girl of Christ* *." The learned Dupin considers this indecent metaphor as a proof that the treatise in question is not the genuine work of Athanasius.

But if such an argument were sufficient to prove a saint not the author of productions ascribed to him, the whole band of saintly writers might be almost reduced to nothing, since the zeal of the Catholic fathers, even when they are praising continence, is very apt to hurry them into the use of an indelicate or voluptuous image.

If the treatise in question is not, in truth, a work of Athanasius, it contains, however, such sentiments on the subject as he is known to have professed. In one unquestioned production of this illustrious saint, there is a passage which not only shews his unbounded respect for virginity, but ex-

* Χορευτρια Χριστου.

plains

plains to us, in some degree, the reason of that extraordinary and indefatigable ardour with which the fathers in general allured the young females of their time into an eternal abstinence from wedlock.

In the close of his apology to the emperor Constantius, the spirited Athanasius inveighs with great indignation against the gross injuries which the religious virgins had suffered from their Arian persecutors; and he introduces his animated invective against the brutality of these ruffians, by a short but significant encomium on the virginity which they insulted. “ The Catholic church,” says the indignant saint, “ is accustomed to call the females, who possess this virtue, the spouses of Christ; and even the Gentiles look upon them with wonder, as the temple of the *Word*; for in no other sect is the venerable and heavenly profession justly supported, but among us Christians alone; *and this, therefore, is a great and particular evidence,*

*" that with us there is assuredly the true religion *."*

We can no longer wonder at the eagerness of the fathers to increase the multitude of monastic virgins, when we find they could thus produce them as an argument to confirm the truth of Christianity. History, perhaps, can hardly shew us a more lamentable abuse of reason than this, by which an institution, certainly inconsistent with the general good of mankind, and of course inconsistent with the genuine spirit and principles of our benevolent religion, is unworthily called a strong evidence of its truth.

It is plain, from this passage, that Athanasius gave little or no credit to professions of virginity among the heathen; and his assertion, to consider it in a more ludicrous

* Μαλιστα γαρ και τωτο μεγα τεκμηριον εστι, τε παρ ημιν ειναι την οντως και αληθη θεοσεβειαν.

Sanct. Athanas.

Vol. i. p. 698. edit. Colon. 1686.

light,

light, is certainly uncandid towards the Pagan Old Maids. Some succeeding saints, in their encomiums on virginity, have treated these ancient ladies with a more liberal respect, as we shall see in the course of our enquiries. I will close this chapter by observing, that a saint of Alexandria, who wrote many years before Athanasius, allows that a female society existed among the Indians, " who continued virgins, were called "*Venerable*, and seemed, by studying the " stars, to acquire the powers of divination *."

* St. Clement of Alexandria, in the 3d book of his Stromata, or Miscellanies, page 539 of the Oxford edition.

C H A P. V.

*On Saint Basil, and his Panegyric on Vir-
ginity.*

AMONG the many ecclesiastical writers of the fourth century, there is no character more eminent than St. Basil, who succeeded to the bishopric of Cæsarea in 369. He has been distinguished by the appellation of *Great*, and has received, perhaps, a still higher title, in being called the Christian Demosthenes.

In the works of this eloquent saint, we have a long and elaborate discourse on *the incorruptible perfection of virginity*. He professes, in the opening of this discourse, which is addressed to an episcopal brother, to draw a large and complete picture of true virginity at full length; and this picture I shall now attempt to copy, but in the size of a miniature.

Saint Basil begins, by asserting the great excellence of virginity : and, to explain this consummate excellence, as he says, in a single sentence, he affirms, it is by this virtue alone that a human being can resemble God. As this is the prime idea, on which almost all the fathers have grounded their excessive praises of monastic celibacy, I shall digress into one observation concerning it.—Although this idea had certainly a very dazzling effect, when embellished by faintly eloquence ; yet, if justly examined, it exhibits, to a mind not tainted with superstition, a very ludicrous absurdity ; for in truth it is saying, that a human being can only resemble the great Author of all things, by producing nothing. Surely it would be more consistent, both with reason and piety, to say, that if human weakness may in any degree aspire to an humble resemblance of the Divine nature, it must be in the tender and faithful discharge of those duties which belong to the parental character.—But I return to St. Basil.

Having

Having asserted the infinite value of virginity, he copiously enumerates the many dangers, to which so precious and delicate a treasure is exposed. He fully explains to the pious virgin how an insidious enemy may encroach on her unsuspecting innocence, through the avenues of her five senses, He dwells on the peculiar perils that belong to each; and explains how the gratification of her palate, though apparently innocent, may insensibly lead her to the loss of her chastity. He observes, that our nature consists of a rational and irrational part; that the Creator has made man like a centaur*, giving him a manly form from the head to the breast, and assigning to his lower half the nature of a beast. St. Basil proceeds to shew the necessity of keeping this inferior division of the human frame in perfect subjection to the superior and more noble part; and this, he says, is chiefly to be effected by

* Ωσπερ τινα κενταυρον συνθεις ο δημιουργος ολον τον ανθρωπον, &c.

Sanct. Basil. de vera Virginitate,

tom. i. p. 615.

refusing

refusing to indulge the palate with any savoury viands.—Having expatiated on the dangers arising from the sense of tasting, he proceeds to the most perilous of all, the sense of feeling; and on this point he seems to think it impossible to arm the virgin with too great a degree of caution.—“ Since,” exclaims the faint, “ there is a fire in all
 “ our limbs, those who wish to preserve the
 “ body entirely free from burning, must
 “ avoid the touch of every limb, lest the
 “ energy of this fire, residing in parts,
 “ should be thus communicated, not only
 “ to the part which has been touched, but
 “ to the whole body, and to the very soul
 “ itself. As the throwing of a stone into a
 “ reservoir does not only agitate that part
 “ of the water on which the stone fell, but,
 “ raising circles one after another, drives
 “ them with a continual agitation to the
 “ very margin—so an amorous glance or a
 “ speech, containing the sweets of licentious
 “ pleasure, being vehemently thrown,
 “ as it were, into the soul of a virgin, as
 “ into

“ into clear water, awakening other amorous ideas, as in the deep, agitates her whole frame, which is struck according to the fancy of the striker.”

I have translated this figurative passage, not only as a specimen of St. Basil's eloquence, but because it contains a remarkable simile, which occurs no less than three times, as Dr. Warton has observed, in the writings of Pope. Whether he borrowed it from St. Basil, or not, I shall leave to the decision of the critics, only transcribing those lines of the poet which have the strongest appearance of being copied from the expressions of the saint.

*As on the smooth expanse of crystal lakes
The sinking stone at first a circle makes,
The trembling surface, by the motion stirr'd,
Spreads in a second circle, then a third;
Wide and more wide the floating rings advance,
Fill all the watery plain, and to the margin
dance.*

Temple of Fame, ver. 436.

To

To proceed with St. Basil.—His discourse is full of metaphorical ornaments—he calls the senses the windows of the soul, “which,” says he, “either opens these windows, like
 “ a chaste woman, with care and moderation, to admit useful light, or looks out
 “ of them, like a harlot, to gaze on every
 “ licentious spectacle, and display her own
 “ wanton vivacity.—Having shewn the necessity of securing these windows with many bolts, he points out to the pious virgin the dangers that may attend her in scenes of nuptial festivity, and unreserved conversation. . He tells her, that the discourse of a virgin should not only be extremely pure, it should also be moderate; she should rather incline to hear others than to speak herself; and, to prove the justice of this maxim, the saint observes, that nature has given her two ears, and only one tongue. He excites her to the contemplation and the love of her celestial spouse, with a magnificence of language highly calculated to dazzle and to inflame every female enthusiast. He
 expatiates

expatiates on the enormous sin of corrupting a canonical virgin. He considers even the touch of a fraternal hand, and the salute of friendship, as dangerous familiarities.

In pointing out to his fair friends the manifold dangers to which they are exposed, he relates a marvellous adventure of a clerical eunuch and a canonical virgin. The story, though related by a saint, is infinitely too gross for the chaste ears of the present age; but I may be allowed to repeat the saint's reason for recording it, as it decently acquaints us with the strange abuses of his time.

“ We are entitled, I think, to pardon,” says the saint, “ for relating these particulars, as we mention them, not only to put the virgin on her guard, but to repress those busy eunuchs who have slipped into the church, since it is clear that their introduction is the contrivance and the work of the devil.”—The good bishop, in the warmth of his indignation against these imperfect churchmen, enters into a

very curious account of their dangerous imbecillity, and illustrates it with some ingenious similies, which I forbear to insert, from an apprehension of wounding the extreme delicacy of the sisterhood; indeed the saint himself, apprehensive that some females might be startled at his mode of handling his subject, introduces an apology, which it may be proper to translate, with some abridgment, both for his sake and my own.—“ Let no one,” says St. Basil, “ object to this discourse, as improper for the “ modesty of a virgin, from its discussing “ too deeply the formation of man; for, in “ the first place, there is no mature virgin so silly as to be ignorant of any thing “ belonging to him out of whose side she “ was taken. Her very limbs, without instruction, are all acquainted with the various purposes of nature; and her lips “ know their office in affairs of love*.

* Ταυτε χειλη ειδεν εν τοις ερωτικοις προς ην πεφουκε χειλιαν.

“ We,

“ We, therefore, are not to be accused, if
“ on this occasion we have unfolded such
“ matters as are by no means unknown to
“ virgins, though regarded by them with a
“ necessary silence. And secondly, If they
“ are really ignorant of man’s nature, lest
“ this ignorance should itself be an intro-
“ duction to sin, we are justified in explain-
“ ing to them that nature, for their own
“ security.”—The saint, having expatiated
on all the rigid duties of monastic virginity,
addresses the bishop, to whom his discourse
is inscribed; and concludes by observing,
that continence is the only effectual caustic
to sear and destroy the multiplying hydra of
licentious desire.

C H A P. VI.

On St. Gregory Nazianzen, and his Poem in Praise of Virginity.—On some Latin Poets of the dark Ages, who have written on the same Subject.

THE next holy encomiast of virginity may undoubtedly be considered as the most extraordinary person that ever reflected lustre on the annals of the church; for he united two characters in himself, which some morose critics of modern times have supposed incompatible, and was both a saint and a poet. I mean the illustrious Gregory Nazianzen, the friend of the great St. Basil; whose epitaph he has written, in some of the most affectionate and pathetic verses that friendship ever inspired; a composition that does the more honour to this canonized poet, as Basil had mortified his ingenuous pride, by placing him in the

P. VOL. II. P wretched

wretched and obscure bishopric of Sasima; which he afterwards exchanged for the episcopal throne of Constantinople, an irksome though splendid elevation; from whence he retired, in the year 381, to poetical solitude in the wilds of Cappadocia, where he closed his remarkable life, in 389, at the age of sixty-two.

Among the various productions of this fainted bard, we have a panegyric on virginity, containing about seven hundred verses. A slight sketch of this poem will, I trust, be amusing to my fair and curious readers. It opens with an air of triumph:

“ * *Our palms, Virginity! shall bind thy brow:*
 “ *From the pure heart flow with melodious*
 “ *joy,*
 “ *Ye songs of purity!—The heavenly zeal*
 “ *Of continence is life’s most precious gift,*
 “ *Out-shining amber, ivory, and gold;*
 “ *’Tis this that bursts the bondage of the*
 “ *world,*

* Παρθενὴν στεφανοῖς αναδύσομεν χριστεγοσίην, &c.

“ *And*

- " *And lifts the high-aspiring soul to Heaven.*
 " *Assist, ye chaste ones, as the hymn begins :*
 " *The virtuous all have part in Virtue's praise.*
 — — — — —
 " *All hail, Virginity ! from God deriv'd,*
 " *Giver thyself of good ! of Innocence*
 " *The lovely parent, and associate fit*
 " *For the unfetter'd sanctities of Heaven !*"

The poet proceeds to descant on the heavenly powers, and to celebrate the virginity of the angels. He then touches on the evils that arise from the flesh, giving a short account of the first formation of man, and the incarnation of Christ ; he considers our Saviour as coming to instruct the world in the principles and practice of true virginity, " a condition," says the poetical saint, " as much superior to marriage as heaven is to earth, and a Divinity to a mortal."

After thus magnifying the merits of continence, the poet indulges himself in bold and spirited personification. He introduces Marriage and Celibacy pleading in opposition

sition to each other ;—Marriage speaks first, and the poet seems to act fairly, by throwing into this harangue many forcible arguments in its favour ; but, as I am unwilling to trespass on the patience of my readers, and apprehend that some of them may not relish a very prolix specimen from the poetry of a saint, I shall only translate the verses in which Virginité is introduced as replying to Marriage, and a few of the most striking passages in her speech.

“ * *Thus Marriage.—Then, with mild and*
 “ *modest brow,*
 “ *In tatter’d garments, and with naked feet,*
 “ *With eyes to earth declin’d, with parting lips*
 “ *Half open held by diffidence, and cheeks*
 “ *Where the pure blood diffus’d a pious glow,*
 “ *Virginité within her loosen’d veil*
 “ *Hid her meek countenance, and mute re-*
 “ *main’d.*
 “ *Her let me thus encourage with due praise! —*

* *Toia γαμος, &c.*

“ *Offspring*

- “ Offspring of Heaven ! and rich in heavenly
power,
“ Mix’d with the choir of angels, though on
“ earth
“ Oft deigning to appear, in earthly shape—
“ Speak here in thy defence ! while by thy side
“ I stand thy guard ; for, Heaven-descended
“ queen !
“ To me thou cam’st, and ever may’st thou come,
“ Kindly attentive to thy servant’s prayer !”
“ Who summons me reluctant to this scene ?
“ Me, ever bent to serve my heavenly Lord
“ In daily labour, and with nightly song,
“ With purifying prayer, and tears that flow
“ To wash out my offences ? who presumes
“ To call me from these pure and pious tasks,
“ To idle contest, and a war of words ?”

With this vindication of her own hallowed dignity, Virginitv begins her reply ; professing to disregard the opinions of men, she declares that she would not condescend to answer her antagonist, did she not tremble

* ——— “ *Lest some one rais’d,
 “ And fluttering in mid air, on the new plumes
 “ Of callow maidenhood, should quickly sink
 “ To earth, the victim of this artful lure.”*

On this consideration she enters on a long attempt to refute all the arguments which had been alledged by Marriage, her persuasive opponent. She begins, by a subtle distinction, to invalidate the plea of utility and delight arising from the production of children: she affirms, that parents are parents only of the *bodies*, not the *minds*, of their offspring; and, as a proof of this, she asserts, that they only lament the bodily infirmities, and not the mental disorders, of their progeny.

This satirical reflection on parental folly hardly affords sufficient ground for the inference which the fair pleader wishes to draw from it; but Virginitv begins to argue with

* Μη τις αεθεις

Παρθενις νεοπηκτον ενι πτερον αιθερι νυμων

Τοις δε λογοις ενι γαιαν ολισθησει ταχιστα.

more

more sound reason, and with more poetical spirit also, when she exclaims,

“ *What mortal can depend on giving birth*
 “ *To such an offspring as his heart desires !*
 “ *For who can tell the secret, how to plant*
 “ *The child of happy or unhappy growth ?—*
 “ *The painter draws the image he beholds*
 “ *In his just portraiture ; the sculptor’s band*
 “ *Fully commands similitude of form,*
 “ *And ductile gold obeys his plastic will ;*
 “ *From perfect seed the happy farmer rears*
 “ *The perfect grain, that answers to his hope :*
 “ *But the vain mortal, who would leave on*
 “ *earth*

“ *A copy of himself (however great*
 “ *His own integrity), cannot decide*
 “ *Whether his genial efforts may produce*
 “ *A Judas or a Paul.*

“ *No—infants are not moulded to the wish*
 “ *Of a fond parent ; but, as one who seeks*
 “ *Amusement in the turning of the dice,*
 “ *Throws them, uncertain whether he may*
 “ *throw*

- " An odd or even number ; not his hand,*
" But the vague movements of the dice decide :
" So marriage gives not birth to good or bad
" At the bare option of its votaries,
" But as the secret laws, or the caprice
" Of nature may determine."

Having thus shewn the uncertainty of those parental delights, on which Marriage appeared to pride itself, Virginitv proceeds to a magnificent encomium on her own superior pleasures, her own beauty and excellence as the chaste spouse of Christ. She then enumerates all the miseries that can arise from the various incidents of married life. She concludes her oration by exhorting all who regard her to persevere in a single state, and to place themselves in Paradise by the merits of chastity.

The poet declares, that those who heard the two pleaders, bestowed the palm on Virginitv. He concludes his poem, however, in a manner much more candid than we might have expected from one passage of

7

of

of it, in which Christ is said to have been born of à virgin, that *marriage might sink to the ground* * ; for, in the three last verses of this singular composition, he introduces our Saviour acting as a kind of moderator between the disputants, by seating Marriage on his left hand, and Virginity on his right.

It is not in this panegyric alone that our poetical saint has expressed his affection to virginity : he has written poems of admonition to virgins, containing many hundred verses. The points he chiefly recommends are, plainness of apparel, and a disposition to solitude and silence. He encourages his disciples to triumph over all the licentious passions, by reminding them of the success with which human resolution has subdued the most furious of the savage beasts ; as an example of this, he affirms, that he has seen a man riding a lion like a horse, and a bear

* Οπως γαμος εις χθονα νευσει.

appearing

appearing to fly by the art of his conductor*.

The orations of this illustrious father contain also many proofs of his incessant attention to the interests of virginity; but the tender compassion with which he considered the sufferings of the sisterhood, under the apostate Julian, seems to have rendered him too credulous. In his first invective against that deluded monarch, he gives an account of some outrages inflicted on Christian virgins, too horrid to be related in this work, and, I am persuaded, too savage to be true.

When we reflect on the warm heart and the elegant genius of this holy bard, we cannot but regret that he did not live in a period more propitious to the cultivation and the display of his many amiable talents,

As I have devoted this chapter to a poetical encomiaſt of chastity, I shall here

* Στρυγεν δὲ δ' ἡγερος ἀρχτος ὀδεύει,
καὶ βροτος ἐξεδίδαξεν, α μὴ φους.

break through the chronological line which I intended to observe, for the sake of exhibiting, in one point of view, the little group of poets who successively celebrated this maidenly perfection.

Be not alarmed, my good reader; I mean not to trouble thee with a long history of all the woeful verse, which the idle monks have scribbled on the contenance of every fainted abbess; for though their fictions are often bold, their poetry is seldom entertaining.

Allow me, however, to terminate this volume with a brief account of the most remarkable characters in the monastic quire of chaste and pious bards, who re-echoed, through the dark ages, the incessant praise of virginity.

The first of these, both in personal rank and in point of time, is Sextus Alcimus Avitus, nephew to the unfortunate emperor of that name. The poet became archbishop of Vienna, and, after acting a very busy and important part in the Christian world,

world, died, with a great reputation for sanctity, in the year 525. This venerable bard has addressed to his sister Fuscina a poetical exhortation to monastic virginity; a state to which, he tells us, many females of his family had been devoted. He excites the young Fuscina to the virtues, that may become her religious character, by various examples; and, to teach her a brave contempt for unmerited calumny, he relates the following very singular anecdote; which I have selected, as the only amusing passage in his long composition:

** The world has echoed with Eugenia's fame,
Who nobly perish'd for her Saviour's name;
But, ere she gloried in a martyr's fate,
Brave was her heart, and her atchievements
great.*

Her

** Eugenix dudum toto celeberrima mundo
Fama fuit, Christi quæ cum pro nomine vitam
Fuderit, ante tamen fortes processit in actus;
Namque habitum mentita viri, non proinde virile
Pectus præficitur sanctis a fratribus abbas.*

Tam

Her sex disguising with a manly air,
 She liv'd an Abbot in a house of prayer;
 To reverend Monks she taught the words of
 truth,

O'er age presiding in the bloom of youth.
 The fiend against her fram'd an hellish plot,
 Her life to threaten, and her fame to blot;
 But by her innocence and modest care,
 The latent virgin triumph'd o'er the snare.
 Beneath the habit of a man conceal'd,
 The sad she comforted, the sick she heal'd;

But

*Tum patris officium complens, ac veste virili
 Fæmineum occultans sexum, muliebria spreuit,
 Et meritis annisque graves, longæque verendos
 Religione senes juvenili rexit in ævo.
 Tunc recti impatiens, omni qui tempore serpens
 Mille dolos, damniq[ue] artes ter mille volutat,
 Invidet Eugeniæ, et sanctum crebrescere frendens
 Nomen, ad assuetas redit undique callidus artes,
 Eugeniæ quærens vulgo traducere; verum
 Quo famam violare cupit, petit inde coronam.
 Quæ sexum mentita pie, cum munia patris
 Sancte exerceret, morbisque levaret adeptis
 Quotquot subsidium sancta pietate rogarent.
 Jamdudum confecta gravis matrona, bonique*

Nominis,

*But soon, deluded by her manly form,
 A matron, with licentious passion warm,
 Tried, tho' in age, with her decaying charms
 To lure the youthful Abbot to her arms.
 When foil'd (how love will hazard each re-
 source!)*

*The old and desperate dame resolv'd on force.
 On her lone bed, in feign'd disorder laid,
 She begs the fancied holy father's aid;
 And as he comes, with charitable pace,
 She springs to seize him in a loath'd embrace.*

The

*Nominis, insano quæ mox accenditur igne
 Virginis, heu specie infelix decepta virili,
 Cumque pudicitiam sanctam, donisque dolisque
 Non semel invasam, frustra captare, nihilque
 Profore se nosset (quid non amor impius ausit?)
 Addere vim verbis statuit; longeque remotis
 Arbitris, morbum simulans, morbique levandi
 Eugeniam causa appellans, vi nititur illam
 Opprimere, inque suos invitam adducere nexus:
 Illa autem valido stuprum clamore repellens,
 Auxiliumque petens magna virtute resistit;
 Ergo luxuriæque suæ matrona parandæ
 Complendiquè expes mulier male perditæ voti,
 A patre Eugenio (qualem decepta putabat*

*The unknown virgin in the Abbot's shape
For succour cries, and struggles to escape.
The guilty matron, frantic with despair,
Frames for the fancied priest an impious snare;
Father Eugenius (she proclaims aloud,
To the attentive slander-loving croud),
Father Eugenius, with a brutal aim,
Has tried to violate her spotless frame.
To public justice she now makes appeal:
The elders meet: and all, with curious zeal,
All flock impatient to th' amazing cause,
Whose novelty a numerous audience draws.
Eugenius now (for, still in garb the same,
The secret virgin bears that manly name)*

Appears

*Ob mutatum habitum longa assuetudine plebes)
Interpellatam stupri sese impia fingit ;
Inque forum vocat innocuam, quo protinus omnis
Turba senum turbata coit, quo denique cuncti
Attoniti novitate rei matresque virique
Currunt. Interea Eugenius (sic nescia sanctam
Matrem turba vocat) populo spectante tribunal,
Causam dicturus, tam diri criminis, intrat ;
Et jam jamque reum secreti ignara tenebat
Publica vis, odio tantum inflammata sinistro ;*

Conscia

*Appears against the horrid charge to plead,
 Believ'd by Envy guilty of the deed.
 When, with that pride which innocence allows,
 The fancied criminal her fraud avows :
 Aside she throws her well-sustain'd disguise,
 Confest a maiden by admiring eyes.
 Th' applauding populace with transport see
 The devil defeated, and the virgin free.
 Thus ever safe true Chastity shall dwell,
 Secure to triumph o'er the snares of hell.*

*Conscia cum sexus proprii, cordisque pudici,
 Vincitur ut vincat jam virgo innoxia fraudem
 Et sexum ostendit, dudum mentita virilem,
 Fæmineum, ac fraudes populo applaudente retexit
 Dæmonis.—Usque adeo casti custodia voti
 Semper tuta manet, multis licet acta procellis.*

Alcimus Avitus

ad Fuscina Sororem.

The copy of Avitus, which I have followed, is printed in a collection of the old ecclesiastical poets, by George Fabricius. Basil. quarto. I mention this circumstance, because the story of Eugenia contains many more verses in the edition of Fabricius, than Mattaire has printed in his *Corpus Poetarum Latinorum*.

The

The singular adventure of this female abbot will, I think, induce my reader to wish for a few more particulars relating to so interesting a personage ; and, by the aid of that pious and gallant historian of holy virgins, Arthur du Monstier, I am enabled to add, that Eugenia was the daughter of Philip, a Roman of high rank, who was præfect of Alexandria in the reign of Commodus. She was distinguished by her personal beauty, and adorned with every mental accomplishment : her application to literature was great ; her memory uncommonly retentive ; and she was equally eloquent in the Greek and Latin language. With these attractions, at the age of fifteen she was demanded in marriage by Aquilius, the son of Aquilius the consul ; but the young Eugenia, being converted to Christianity, made her escape privately from her heathen parents, and, disguising herself in the habit of a man, took refuge in a religious house, not far from Alexandria. Here she met with the remarkable occurrences recorded

in the poetry of Avitus. It is said that she converted both her parents to her new religion; that her father suffered martyrdom; and that Eugenia herself, returning to Rome with her mother, whose name was Claudia, experienced the same fate, in the reign of Gallienus.—Such is the account given of Eugenia in the curious work of Du Monstier, intitled, *Sacrum Gynecæum*, a pious biographical treasure, containing all the sanctified females of the Christian world. Her merits are celebrated by almost every writer who has touched upon the Catholic virgins; and her name is mentioned with honour by two succeeding Latin poets, of whom I am now to speak.

The first of these is Venantius Fortunatus, a poet on whose history I enter the more willingly, as it is connected with that of a fair lady, who, if she were an Old Maid, as some of her biographers have asserted, was undoubtedly among the most remarkable of the sisterhood, being at once a queen and a saint, a virgin and a wife.

This singular personage was the lovely princess Radegunda; who, being taken prisoner in her infancy by Clotaire, king of the Franks, was married in Soissons, at the age of fifteen, and in the year 538, to that savage hero, the destroyer of her father's kingdom, and the assassin of her brother. This unfortunate princess is universally described as a model of beauty; but her personal charms were surpassed by her piety. She wore an under vest of hair-cloth, and loaded her delicate body with a chain of iron. Du Monstier affirms, that although she lived a few years with the king her husband, she obtained from that amorous monarch the privilege of remaining a virgin. The more modern author of that amusing book, intitled "*Anecdotes of the Queens of France* *," is inclined to prove the falshood of this problematical fact, by the expressions of her first biographers, who describe

* *Anecdotes des Reines et Regentes de France*,
6 tom. 1776.

her as rising early from the bed of the king. But without venturing to decide on so nice a question, I shall proceed in the more certain history of Radegunda.—After residing three years with Clotaire, she obtained his permission to retire; and, founding an abbey at Poitiers, she enjoyed in it all the tranquil pleasures of religious retirement. She possessed an affection for literature; and she was happy in the society of two the most eminent authors of that age, Gregory bishop of Tours, the historian, and Fortunatus the poet, who had the honour of being secretary to the pious Radegunda, and was promoted to the bishopric of Poitiers.

Fortunatus was an Italian, of an elegant mind and insinuating manners: it was probably to flatter the chaste fancy of his royal mistress, that he composed his singular poem “On a celestial Synod, and the Virtue of Virginity*.” This performance opens

* De Senatu Curiae cælestis, et Virtute Virginitatis.
Fortunati Poem. Lib. 7.

with a full convocation of all the eminent heavenly virgins and martyrs; when they are assembled before the throne of God, the voice of the Divinity announces his design of rewarding the pious and chaste passion of an earthly maiden, and describes the holy tenderness and ardour with which she panted for a celestial spouse. The verses that include this description are remarkably spirited and elegant, for the age in which they were composed:—the maiden is represented as thus venting the fond enthusiasm of her soul:

** Tell me, where art thou, whom I die to see!
Where is the latent road that leads to thee?
How would I haste my soul's desire to meet,
Could starry paths support my pendent feet!*

Now

** Dic ubi sis quem exspecto gemens, qua te urbe requiram,
Quare sequar, nullis semita nota locis:
Ipsa venire velim properans, si posset in astris
Pendula sydereum planta tenere viam.
Nunc sine te fuscis graviter nox incubat alis;
Ipsaque sole micans est mihi cæca dies.*

Q 3

Lilia,

*Now without thee I feel oppressive night,
And dark to me the sun's meridian light.
In vain the richest flowers their fragrance
shed;*

*For all the sweets of earth to me are dead.
Each passing cloud to see thee I pursue,
For love directs to heaven my wandering
view:*

*I bless the storm on which thy feet have trod,
And ask the winds where I may find my God.*

Having proclaimed the merits of this chaste and fervent devotee, the sacred voice declares, that she shall possess the sanctity she desires; and her name is inrolled in the eternal register*. The poet proceeds to tell, how the newly-consecrated virgin is de-

Lilia, narcissus, violæ, rosa, nardus, amomum,

Oblectant animos germina nulla meos.

Ut te conspiciam per singula nubila pendo,

Et vaga per nebulas lumina ducit amor.

Ecce procellosos suspecta interrogo ventos,

Quid mihi de Domino nunciet aura meo.

* Nomen perpetuo scribitur inde libro.

corated

corated with all the jewels of heaven; he affirms, however, that the chaste and humble virtues are her best ornaments: he magnifies the excellence of virginity compared to the miseries of a married life; and he concludes with a prayer, addressing the whole poem to the chaste and pious Agnes, whom his royal mistress Radegunda had raised to the dignity of abbess, in the religious house which she herself had founded. Perhaps it may be a groundless conjecture, but I am inclined to believe that Fortunatus composed this poem with infinite art, intending an oblique and concealed compliment to the problematical virginity of Radegunda herself, though in the close he addresses himself to Agnes as the virgin, who had thus made a kind of holiday in heaven. My conjecture arises from the following remarkable circumstances:—In the long description of this celestial ceremony, the name of this virgin, so interesting to all the powers of heaven, is not once mentioned, although it is said to be inscribed in the eternal volume.

This singular omission persuades me, that the poet wished to compliment some lady as a virgin of uncommon sanctity, whom he did not think it prudent to name. His cold manner of addressing the poem to Agnes, appears to me as a kind of mask to his real intention. Besides, there are some passages, in his enthusiastic description of the chaste female so highly honoured by Heaven, which do not agree with the condition of Agnes, and may be applied with an elegant propriety to his royal mistress Radegunda. After describing this anonymous virgin as decorated with a long catalogue of celestial jewels, the poet exclaims :

* *Deck'd with these gems a heavenly queen
 she'll reign,
 And rule, a virgin, o'er the angelic train.*

There is also another poem of Fortunatus, expressly on the virtues of Radegunda,

* *His cumulata bonis thalamo regina sedebit,
 Atque poli sobolem sub pede virgo premet.*

in

in which, after having compared her to the most celebrated of the holy virgins, for charity and abstinence, for devotion and fortitude, he adds,

** To speak thy farther merits I refrain,
Which from thy conscious God full glory gain.*

Such are the grounds of my conjecture: whether Radegunda was in truth an Old Maid, and whether her ingenious secretary intended to pay her an oblique compliment for the peculiar delicacy with which she has been supposed to acquire and support that venerable character, are points which I must now leave to the discussion of the curious. However great the chastity of this pious queen might be, it has not escaped detraction; and our poet himself has been suspected of possessing too lively an interest in her heart. Some late biographers of the fair royal saint have consi-

** Cætera nunc taceam melius, quia teste Tonante,
Judicioque Dei, glorificata manent.*

dered

dered this calumny as the immediate suggestion of the devil, provoked by the peculiar purity of Radegunda; but it appears to have arisen rather from the carelessness of some early writers, who, finding in the poems of Fortunatus, that he had been accused of being a little too fond of the abovementioned Agnes, made a mistake in their account of this matter, and transferred his supposed affection from the abbess to the queen. The truth seems to be, that Fortunatus lived in a very pleasing and innocent familiarity with these two pious ladies. They amused themselves in sending little presents of sweetmeats, and other monastic delicacies, to their ingenious friend. He acknowledged their favours with poetical gallantry. The extempore verses which he composed on such occasions are printed with his poems; they do honour to the tenderness of his heart, and the elegance of his genius; but though they often breathe the warm spirit of affection, they are far from throwing any stain on the purity of his morals.

als. His royal mistress is said, by the authors of the Literary History of France, to have ended her life in 587 : our poet died in 609, and his festival is yet celebrated at Poitiers, on the 14th of December.

The following pious herald of chastity in the dark ages was an illustrious character of our own country. I mean the great Aldhelm, bishop of Shireburn in Dorsetshire, during the Saxon heptarchy. This canonized bard was not only distinguished by peculiar sanctity, but excelled in the sister arts of poetry and music, and has been celebrated as the person who introduced Latin verse into England.

His poetical talents were great indeed, for the period in which he flourished ; and he exerted them in a composition of heroic verse, extolling the most eminent votaries of virginity, both male and female. In the latter catalogue the following are his heroines—the Virgin Mary, and the Saints Cæcilia, Agatha, Lucia, Justina, Eugenia, Agnes, Thecla, Eulalia, Scholastica, Constantina,

stantina, Eustochium, Demetrias, Anastasia, Rufina Secunda, Anatolia, Victoria.

As a specimen of Aldhelm's poetry, I shall select his verses on Cæcilia, whose talents have rendered her the most interesting of female saints.

** What happy page with lively praise may frame
A just memorial to Cæcilia's name,
Who led her bridegroom's soul, by lessons pure,
To spurn corporeal joy's luxurious lure!
Tho' fam'd for music's melting powers, the fair
Escap'd from worldly pomp, and pleasure's
snare.*

*Thus she began, when, on her bridal night,
Her glowing consort claim'd his blissful right:*

“ For

** Porro Cæcilie vivacem condere laudem
Quæ valeat digne metrorum pagina versu?
Quæ sponsum proprium convertit dogmate sancto,
Mellea carnalis contemnens ludicra luxus.
Bafia dum potius dilexit dulcia Christi,
Candida præpulchris complectens colla lacertis,
Quamvis harmoniis præsultent organa multis
Musica pierio resonent et carmina cantu,*

Non

" For me behold! for me," the virgin cries,
 " A tutelary spirit quits the skies :
 " He, my blest patron! by a kind decree
 " Is bound from sensual love to keep me free :
 " No mortal, burning with impure desire,
 " May dare to touch me with licentious fire :
 " My heavenly champion, with angelic sway,
 " Would force the rash invader from his prey."
 The pious bride converted thus her lord ;
 His ancient error he with scorn abhorr'd,

In

Non tamen inflexit fallax præcordia mentis
 Pompa profanorum, quæ nectit retia sanctis,
 Ne forte properet paradisi ad gaudia miles.
 Talibus interea compellens vocibus infit,
 Dum secreta petunt concessa lege tororum :
 " Angelus es," inquit, " superis tranavit ab astris!
 " Hic me patronus cælesti fœdere fulcit,
 " Ut nequeam prorsus quidquam carnalis amare :
 " Namque meum jugiter conservat corpus in ævum,
 " Ut nullus valeat, spurco succensus amore,
 " Contrectare mea probroso crimine membra ;
 " Sed mox angelicis ulciscens vindicat armis,
 " Qui me pollutis nituntur prendere palmis."
 Sic devota Deo convertit femina sponsum :

Nec

*In union chaste the martyr's crown they gain,
And Heaven repays them for their mortal pain.*

Such is Aldhelm's panegyric on the celebrated St. Cæcilia; and, as it may amuse the curious to compare this mitred bard with our old poet Chaucer, who has told the same marvellous story, I shall insert in a note a few lines from the latter*.

The

*Nec non et levirum solvens errore vetusto,
Donec credentes sumpsissent dona lavacri;
Facti municipes in summis arcibus ambo
Martyres effecti carnis tormenta luentes.*

Sanct. Althelmus de Laude Virginum.

In Canisii Thesauro, tom. i. p. 742.

The learned reader will readily pardon some omissions in the translation of these verses.

* *The night came, and to bedde must she gon
With hire husbond, as it is the manere;
And prively she said to him anon—
O swete and wel beloved spouse dere,
Ther is a conseil, and ye wol it here,
Which that right fayn I wold unto you saie,
So that ye swere ye wol it not bewraie.*

Valerian

The poem of the Saxon bishop is to be considered only as a kind of supplement to his elaborate treatise in prose on the same interesting topic. The author of Aldhelm's Life in the Biographia Britannica has, by trusting to the authority of Bede, committed a mistake in his account of these separate performances, which he represents as a single work of verse and prose intermixed.

They

*Valerian gan fast unto hire swere,
That for no cas, ne thing that mighte be,
He shulde never to non bewraien here ;
And then at erst thus to him saide she—
I have an Angel, which that loveth me,
That with gret love, wher so I wake, or slepe,
Is redy ay my body for to kepe ;*

*And if that he may felen out of drede,
That ye me touch or love in wilanie,
He right anon wol fleen you with the dede,
And in your youthe thus ye shulden die :
And if that ye in clene love me gie,
He wol you love as me, for your clenenesse,
And shew to you his joye and his brightnesse.*

This

They are not only distinct productions, but have been published apart. It appears that the prosaic essay was first written, as in the close of it the author intimates his design of handling the same delicate subject once more, in verse.

*This Valerian, corrected as God wold,
Answerd again—If I shal trusten thee,
Let me that Angel seen, and him behold;
And if that it a veray Angel be
Than wol I don as thou hast prayed me.*

The second Nonne's Tale.

Tyrwhitt's Chaucer, vol. iii. p. 70.

It is justly observed by this excellent editor, that Chaucer originally composed his story of Cæcilia as a separate work, and afterwards united it to the Canterbury Tales—that he closely copied the Life of Saint Cæcilia in the Golden Legend of Jacobus Janensis—and that he mentions his own performance in the list of his laudable and pious works.

*And for to speke of othir holiness,
He hath in prose translated Boece,
And made the Life also of Saint Cecile.*

Legende of good Women.

As

As this chapter is already longer than I intended, I shall only select one passage from his prosaic treatise, exhibiting a most singular scale of virtue (if I may use such an expression) by which human merit was measured in the age of this accomplished saint. “* It is recorded,” says Aldhelm, “in a certain volume, from the narration of an angel, how virginity, chastity, and wedlock, differ from each other, and mark, in three degrees, the quality or worthiness of life; how, according to the

* In quodam volumine angelicâ relatione refertur, quomodo virginitas, castitas, jugalitas, tripertitis gradibus separatim differant; quæ, sicut trifariâ disparis vitæ qualitate, sigillatim sequestrantur; ita discretis meritorum ordinibus tripliciter dirimuntur, angelo hoc modo alternatim distinguente: ut sit virginitas aurum, castitas argentum, jugalitas aramentum; ut sit virginitas divitiæ, castitas mediocritas, jugalitas captivitas; ut sit virginitas sol, castitas luna, jugalitas tenebræ; ut sit virginitas dies, castitas aurora, jugalitas nox.—P. Aldhelmi Liber de Laudibus Virginitatis, cap. xix. edit. Wharton. 4to. London, 1693.

“ angel’s discrimination, virginity is gold,
“ chastity silver, and wedlock brass; how
“ virginity is wealth, chastity a competence,
“ and wedlock poverty; how virginity is
“ peace, chastity redemption, and wedlock
“ captivity; how virginity is the sun, chas-
“ tity the moon, and wedlock darkness;
“ how virginity is day, chastity the dawn,
“ and wedlock night.”

The ingenious prelate continues to illustrate this angelical division of human merits by many more metaphors of equal force, and then tells us the precise meaning of these three significant terms—a necessary explanation, as, without it, a modern reader would be little able to understand the anonymous angel thus quoted by Aldhelm! “ Virginity,” says the good bishop, “ is a
“ voluntary attachment to a single life;
“ chastity is that state of purity observed
“ by those who, after the ceremony of
“ marriage, separate, and abstain from ma-
“ trimonial intercourse, for the sake of
“ heaven, despising that ordinary wed-
“ lock

“lock by which children are lawfully
“produced.”

This very curious triple estimate of human merit occurs also in the poem on virginity ; and, as that poem is extremely scarce, I shall transcribe the verses.

*Humani generis triplex distantia fertur,
Quæ modo per mundum triquadro cardine degit,
Et studet in terris mercari regna Tonantis.
Denique nonnullos sortitur vita jugalis,
Qui rectè vivunt concessa lege tororum,
Et præcepta Dei toto conamine mentis
Conservare student, thalami sub jure manentes.*

Posthæc castrorum gradus alter, et ordo secundus

*Subsequitur, nupti, qui jam connubia spernunt,
Ac indulta sibi scindunt retinacula luxûs.
Lurida linquentes spurcæ consortia carnis,
Ut castis proprium conservent moribus ævum,
Dum connexa prius thalamorum vincula rumpunt.*

*Tertia virgineis fulgescit vita lucernis,
Cujus præcellit præfatos infula ritus.
Mundani luxûs calcans ludibria falsa,*

*Virginitas summo virtutum vertice floret,
Dum soror angelicæ constet castissima vitæ.*

Sanct. Althelmus, ut supra.

Such was the doctrine of the famous Aldhelm, which throws a considerable light on the practices of the times in which he lived, when the great purpose of marriage was often defeated, as in the case of King Edward the Confessor, by a vain pretension to superior sanctity. This poetical prelate was so passionate an admirer of pure virginity, that he put his own continence to many singular and dangerous trials. It is related by his elegant and affectionate biographer, William of Malmesbury, that Aldhelm did not, like other priests, avoid the company of women, but often detained some virgin by his side, both sitting and lying, and, while he held her in his embraces, repeated his whole psalter, to the confusion of the devil *.

However

* Vel affidens vel cubitans aliquam detinebat, quoad carnis tepescente lubrico, quieto et immoto discederet

However this conduct might encrease the veneration which was paid to this extraordinary saint, I cannot help condemning it as an instance of cruelty and injustice.

Great as his exultation and triumph might be, on thus deriding the devil, as his biographer expresses it, by a marvellous display of his own subdued desires, he had certainly no right to sport so wantonly with the passions of those religious Old Maids (for they could hardly be young ones) whom he thus made the uneasy instruments of his own chaste reputation.

In speaking of the most eminent poets, who amused the dark ages by celebrating the wonderful virgins of that period, I ought not to omit the venerable Bede. He has enlivened his ecclesiastical history,

discederet animo. Derideri se videtur diabolus, cernens adhærentem sceminam virumque aliàs avvocato animo insistentem cantando psalterio.

Wil. Malmf. de Vita Aldhelmi,
Anglia Sacra, vol. ii. p. 13.

by inserting a poetical panegyric on the chaste Ædilhryda, a lady who chose to fly from the bed and throne of her husband Ecfrid, king of Northumberland, for the sake of preserving her virginity in a cloister. For this pious exploit she is extolled in the highest terms by the holy bard; who, in singing her praises, seems to felicitate himself, with a gallant complacency, that he is superior to Virgil in the happy choice of his subject *. It is, however, remarkable, that the greatest poet of our country has mentioned this obstinate royal virgin in terms of indignation and reproach. Milton, in his History of England, has condescended to relate the adventure of this pious fugitive, in the following language:—
 “ Another adversity befel Ecfrid in his family, by means of Etheldrith his wife,

* *Bella Maro resonet, nos pacis dona canamus:*

— — — — —
 — — — — —

Luxus erit lubricis, carmina casta mihi.

Bedæ Hymnus de Ædilhryda.

“ king Anna’s daughter, who, having taken
 “ him for her husband, and professing to
 “ love him above all other men, persisted
 “ twelve years in the obstinate refusal of
 “ his bed, thereby thinking to live the
 “ purer life ; so perversely then was chastity
 “ instructed against the apostle’s rule : at
 “ length obtaining of him, with much im-
 “ portunity, her departure, she veiled her-
 “ self a nun, then, made abbess of Ely, died
 “ seven years after the pestilence; and might
 “ with better warrant have kept faithfully
 “ her undertaken wedlock, though now
 “ canonized St. Audrey of Ely*.”

Milton has not deigned to enter into a
 very whimsical part of this lady’s history ;
 but a monastic historian informs us, that
 her husband, repenting of the indulgence
 he had granted to her, and inflamed with
 new desire, determined to force her from
 her religious retreat, and to consummate his

* Milton’s History of England, page 76, Birch’s
 edition.

marriage :

marriage: she escaped both from his love and his resentment, by a series of the most extraordinary miracles, which the curious reader may find very circumstantially related in the first volume of Dugdale's *Monasticon*. After sustaining great hardships, she is said to have expired a perfect virgin, in the year 679; and the miracles displayed at her tomb were not inferior to those by which her life was distinguished.

I cannot close the volume without lamenting the sufferings of the fair sex in the ages of ignorance and superstition. When all the saints of the time most zealously asserted, that it was meritorious in a married woman to remain a virgin, domestic life must have been frequently embittered by tragi-comical contention; and, perhaps, the mind of many a well-meaning woman has been half-distracted by the struggle, which such doctrine may have produced, between tenderness and devotion. It may, however, afford us some consolation to reflect, that whenever these good ladies were misled by the priesthood

hood into a painful sacrifice of innocent delight, their pride was incessantly gratified by the pious honours that were lavished upon their rigid virginity: yet their passion for such honours was sometimes repressed by the stronger feelings of personal vanity, as we may collect from a ludicrous miracle related by Gregory of Tours. That historian gives us a circumstantial account of a noble and pious pair, who, being married in their youth, passed through life together with this extraordinary continence, at the particular request of the lady. She happened to die first, and, as her good man attended her funeral, he exclaimed, while the body was sinking into the grave, "I thank thee, eternal God, that as I received this treasure from thee, so I return it immaculate to thy goodness." Upon this the dead lady said with a smile, "Why do you mention matters on which you are not interrogated *?"—The sequel of the miracle

* Multos postea in uno strato recumbentes annos vixerunt cum castitate laudabili, quod postea in eorum transitu

racle is not less striking. The husband died soon afterwards, and though he was buried in a tomb not contiguous to that of his wife, it was observed, the next day, that their sepulchres were united. The devout historian seems to consider these incidents as proofs of the most signal chastity; but they may with as much reason be alledged as proofs, that the spotless lady, who had so strongly petitioned her husband to release her from the duties of a wife, did not relish his public declaration that she died an Old Maid.

transitu declaratum est. Nam cum impleto certamine puella migraret ad Christum, peracto vir funeris officio, cum puellam in sepulchrum deponeret, ait, "Gratias tibi ago, æterne Domine noster, quia hunc thesaurum, sicut a te commendatum accepi, ita immaculatum pietati tuæ restituo." Ad hæc illa subridens, "Quid," inquit, "loqueris quod non interrogaris?" Greg. Turonensis Hist. Francorum, lib. i. cap. 42.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

